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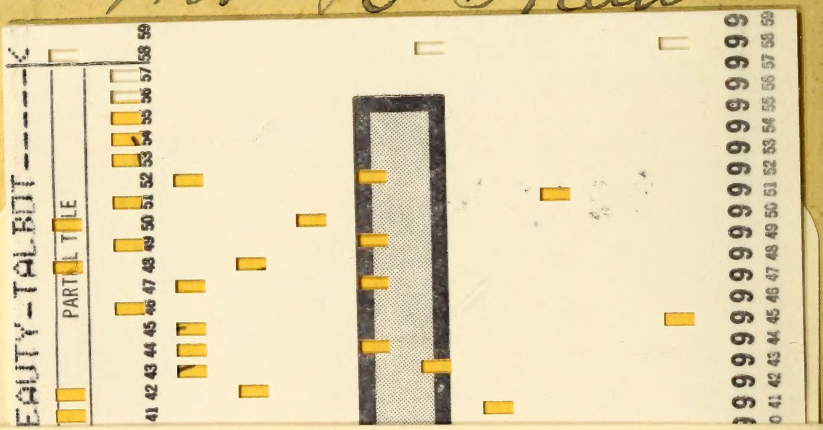

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BEAUTY TALBOT.

BY

PERCY FITZGERALD, M.A.

AUTHOR OF "BELLA DONNA," "NEVER FORGOTTEN," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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BEAUTY TALBOT.

CHAPTER I.

MISS LIVY'S FIRST APPEARANCE.

THERE is a pretty by-way of the Great Western, considered a failure as to traffic, and quite as retired as a little country lane or bridle-road. It wound up to the station, Pengley, through a deep cutting made by Nature, and lined with a velvety sward, and trimmings of Nature's own millinery. The station burrowed snugly at the bottom, just as a lap-dog does on his mistress's skirt, and was fenced at the other end from winds and showers, by a sudden hill, where a tunnel

began. The house was like a Swiss station, with a varnished wood verandah overgrown with creepers; and squire and clergyman often said any man would be well off in that little box, and that they would change with Fenton any day. Fenton, the station master, was always treated in a studiously friendly and intimate way; —for the legend ran that, "Fenton was a gentleman;"—had been a lieutenant in the army, had run through everything, and some Sir John had got him this place. He was a very gentlemanly man, a little sensitive, and above his situation; which, wisely and well, was never alluded to, or droned over by him. The little Swiss station was, of course, like a pigeon cot, and from every window hopped little heads in and out, like Sir John Suckling's mice, and those heads were, of course, the property of the *çi-devant* officer.

Round about it rose and fell a warm cozy sort of country, with a snug and sheltered lane that led up to a village, and another that brought us to a no less sheltered high road, along which wandered the unfrequent tramp, or groaned the laden four horse waggon, and merrily bowled the light coach, which the railway had not yet driven out, as St. Patrick might have done a solitary snake. Half a mile off behind the clump, nestled the village, which was indeed not worth a station, and beyond the village a dotted settlement of not more than half a dozen houses, which was the neighbourhood. These were of an old pattern, and stood scattered like vedettes. Here was none of the herding, and economical clustering of new houses upon ground that is being built upon.

One Saturday evening in winter, which

is the evening of our first little scene, Fenton, the station-master, has just turned in to his office, after standing deferentially on his platform to do homage to the express, which thundered by contemptuously, and would not know Pengley. For the express, Pengley had a sacred awe and admiration, yet mingled with dislike, as for a badge of servitude. It had to do with humble, plebeian trains that came creeping up, after stopping at every station. In a quarter of an hour after the express had gone by, such a decent convoy was due; and now Fenton hears the jingling of bells, and looking through his window sees the Red Hill little carriage coming over the bridge, Mr. Talbot driving, and which will turn presently and trundle down the little lane to the station. Friendly vehicles were often thus seen at a distance, and Fenton always contrived

to detain the train, on some pretext. Mr. Talbot gets out and comes on the platform to talk to Fenton.

"Miss Livy in the next train?" says Fenton.

"Yes," answers Mr. Talbot, taking out a rich and gaudy cigar case of seal skin—a large golden monogram, and crimson watered silk lining, &c.

"You know a good cigar, Fenton?"

Charming and delicate fingers held out the case; choice rings were on them, the finest linen about the wrist, above the wrist a coat of fur. Mr. Talbot was tall, slight, graceful, with black hair, no beard or moustache, because his mouth and smile were considered "charming," and looked no more than five-and-thirty. He was about forty; clothes, everything, were of the best make; he was pale, his hair was parted in the middle, and he was the father

of the heroine of this little narrative, Miss Olivia Talbot.

The two gentlemen walk up and down the station. The station-master never says "sir," but at the same time never alludes, or notices allusions, to his older and better days.

"She went in to get some finery," said Mr. Talbot, "for her mamma and self. Those Hardman people open their staring new house with a dinner to-night."

"Yes," said the other; "look here, and here," pointing to parcels and boxes. "It has been the same for this month back."

"Exactly. Wealth, money, vulgarity, all daubed on in its grossest form. A blazing dinner. But they will find it hard to astonish *me*, even if the chairs were of solid gold. We *have* to go."

"Here is the train."

And out came the one porter, and the one third-class passenger, who was going to get in. The porter began his song, "Pengley! Pengley! Pengley!" going down the carriages, until he opened a door, and, touching his cap, began to take out parcels. Then a young lady, followed by a stout woman in black, came out, and tripped up softly to Mr. Talbot, and gave him a kiss, which she would have done had it been an excursion train, full of grinning "cads" and clodhoppers; but it was a range of desolate saloon carriages, with a scattered gentleman or two, reading newspapers.

This is Miss Livy. The evening is a little grey, but it is easy to see her. She is small, but delicately made, with a peaked velvet hat and green plume, a little gay, with a delicately cut face, which was so like her father's in this way; that any one

looking at *him*, at once thought of her, though no one looking at her, ever dreamed of him. The reader will see what a distinction is here. She was not more than eighteen, but had a possessed manner that people of thirty often want, and which gave her a specially piquant charm; for a contrast between so young a face and so wise a little soul was a delight and surprise to observers. At times, however, she would give the word, all the lamps would be turned on, and that delicate face lit up with a perfect illumination of good spirits and intelligence. But these small points will work themselves out in her character, as this little history goes on.

"Beauty, dear," she said, nervously —and she rarely called him papa, for she had long discoverd that he thought himself more like her brother, or hus-

band—"let us get to the carriage quickly I just escaped that odious Hardman, who is in the train."

But she was not to escape now; for the tall arrogant-looking man, with head and hat thrown back, and nose and chin in the air, and a kind of Brummagen "statesmanship" in the way he carried his umbrella under his arm (copied from Canning, and Peel, statues), was coming up to them. His face was thin and pinched, and with those coarse streaks of pink we see in the skin of a man of low origin, as though his cheeks had done hard service, like his hands.

This was Mr. Hardman of The Towers yonder, who had made his money in banks and railways, and was said to have begun as an errand-boy in the City, and then had been a ticket collector. He had got into Parliament for a Scotch

burgh, which he had bought, as he had bought his place, and bought so clumsily, that he had to stand a most expensive contest and more expensive unseating. He had bought The Towers from a lord, and would have preferred it on that account to a handsomer place at a lower price.

"Very unwarrantable—scandalous!" he said, as he came. "I told *my* coachman to be here a good quarter before the time. Must be an accident."

"Can't say, indeed, Mr. Hardman," said Mr. Talbot, coldly.

"It must be explained though. That man came to me from Farnaby—had been seven years with the Duke—the highest character. Scandalous! Or there must be an accident."

"I wish we could help you. Our ponies could hardly do the five miles,

then five miles back, and then go again for your dinner."

"Oh, *a carriage will come.* We have plenty there. But to be kept waiting here! You'll be in time. We expect a large party, and some coming a greater distance than you are."

Miss Livy was in the carriage,—station-master, porter, and small boy, who carried up a parcel, all busy arranging rugs about her. She had the "ribbons" in her hand, and the light whip, carriage, and ponies suited her as if they had been made to measure. The latter were dappled iron grey, round and short, and coquettishly arching their necks, as indeed their mistress often did hers. Mr. Talbot got in beside her, arranging his fur, &c., about his figure, perhaps to be picturesque to any stray villager they might encounter. Livy gave a touch to

Bouncer, the pony she liked the least, and with a sudden plunge and scattering of gravel they were off, she leaving a pleasant nod and smile to the group.

CHAPTER II.

"THE HOME."

They turned reluctantly to Mr. Hardman, still stalking in the Peel attitude, and whose lips were pursing and blowing indignantly at "the slight."

He to be kept waiting! "I pay my coachman seventy pounds a year —one of the best in England. Came to me from Farnaby," &c. He did not care to speak to the station-master or porter. For the former, indeed, he had a contempt, as being a reduced gentleman. Presently the sound of wheels was heard; and a showy yellow carriage—"my colour"—with sheriff-like liveries, was com-

ing over the bridge. Mr. Hardman stalked out.

"What's this delay? I have been kept!"

The footman explained.

The Duke's coachman did not condescend to offer any excuse—

"Please, sir, I was out with the young ladies;—didn't come in till five minutes ago."

"But I pay other servants. It is most improper, most irregular, and, really, Miller, I hope it won't occur again."

Then the Duke's coachman looked down coldly,—

"Beg pardon, sir; what was you saying to me, sir?"

"Never mind now. I expect you to drive fast."

And they drove away, certainly as

fast as a fine pair of carriage horses could take them; for which animals many knew that "I gave Hopper, of Manchester, my cheque for five hundred."

The Duke's coachman had bought them, and some judges said they were "fair enough in their way," but were not worth three hundred.

Miss Livy had always plenty to say to her young brother-father. There are members of families who never talk to each other save when they have something to tell; news, business—or, perhaps, want to know something. It is beginning to be understood, indeed, that the art of conversation is chiefly based on talking about nothing. Good spirits, good will, and good humour are certainly the three keys. Our Livy had them all in her possession, hung, as it might be, to

that gold chatelaine of hers. Whereas her dear Talbot's key was himself, his mirror, and his monkey; or, less metaphorically, his own plans, own prospects, pleasures, and such like, on which, to do him justice, he could enlarge charmingly. And, let it be said, that to listen to people telling you about themselves is not unentertaining, provided it be not a mere brutal exhibition of selfishness—akin to looking at yourself in the glass—the man or woman turning *you* into such a mirror.

"That low beast, Hardman, I wish we weren't going to him. He grates on me at every turn; but your mother thought it right."

"But you recollect, dear," said she; "Phœbe, you know, and her admirer."

"I see nothing in it, and said so from the beginning. He is a knowing,

selfish old campaigner. But, of course, as she has set her mind on it——"

"And it will be so amusing, dear; we shall have so much to laugh at and talk of."

"That's true. There's nothing so comical as wealthy vulgarity. I dare say I shall have some offensive bit of trade stuck on to me."

"No, no. They will give you some nice-looking, well-born officer's wife. They know well how brilliantly you talk and write, and what good society you have been in. A handsome fellow isn't to be thrown away."

"What does it matter, being handsome or brilliant in a place like this?" said Mr. Talbot, despairingly. "I might as well show myself to the Andaman Islanders. Still, we shall amuse ourselves; unless they show their igno-

rance and ill-breeding, by some stupid *gaucherie* taking your mother in second, or something of the kind."

"They couldn't," said she, eagerly; "there is something about mamma—I don't know how to describe it—an air, a style of birth, and good society, that it would be impossible to overlook. That dignity and look of refinement, Beauty dear, seems to me to come out in contrast with these sort of people; and any stranger, seeing you and her coming into the room, would know the true metal, and ask your name."

"There is a good deal in that, Livy. Your mother *has* that sort of air of good breeding and high birth which can't be bought. It is far better than good looks, which have got cheap enough."

As they talk and drive on, to the jangling of the Norwegian bells, the

quick-sighted reader may have guessed from this fragment what was in Miss Livy's mind. Nay, a shrewd observer, having heard such a snatch of conversation in real life, would construct the whole social interior of this household much as the ingenious Owen made up whole elks and megatheria from a toe-joint. It seemed as though that pretty young girl, having this young and good-looking father, was likely enough to have at home a mamma a good deal older, and who, alas! was growing older, as women do, far faster than he was. Was Livy the one who stood between, and so amiably held her hands before her father's good eyes; or else a gauze veil before her mamma's fading charms, and with ceaseless exertion tried every day to make the disagreeable old man with the scythe mow gently, or appear not to

mow at all? And it is a fact that she absolutely succeeded to a degree. At least, with another less laborious in the house, the family of Talbot the Handsome would have been in a poor way. Faith moves mountains; but love's labour is rarely lost.

When Livy fluttered up the steps into the house, she found two ladies in the circular drawing-room. One of them was her mother, the other her mother's sister, the Honourable Phœbe.

The Honourable Phœbe was a poor infirm creature; she had not the style, or the looks, or the genius, as it may be called, of her sister. She was "getting on to a cool forty," said the ill-natured ones, whose business is to watch these things; but she had not the exquisite art of disguising. Her nose was *retroussé*, turned up, in fact; and though it would

be beyond art or science to alter that, still, is there not a way of *diverting* attention from so obnoxious a feature, by developing other shining beauties? The skilful painter can make a black appear pale blue, by disposing certain colours about it. She could do little for herself, and never could. She had good-will, and nothing else. She did not know how to economise speech or action, to methodise her conduct, so as to conduce to a great end. She did not know how to arrange her wares, such as they were, in her shop window. The best were lying in the cellars, until her sister and Livy good-naturedly stepped in, and naturally offered to help her, and teach her shopkeeping.

A certain Colonel Labouchere, who commanded the ——th regiment of Hussars, a man with grey moustache, but still gay and not old, who had been a

dashing cavalry officer, had somehow taken notice of Phœbe at several balls. He had danced, he had talked, he had walked with her. The paint brush of Phœbe, dipped in the most glowing colours, had worked out of these materials a picture of the most gorgeous kind, and drew the grey Colonel like one of his own Arabian chargers — eager, flaming-eyed, uncontrollable, with the bit between his teeth, and frantic to clear the matrimonial hurdles at a bound.

This account was received by her relatives with their usual large margin of allowance, Phœbe's incorrect drawing, and over enormous canvases, being well known to them. But they were very good-natured; and when it was known that the Hussar regiment had moved recently to ——, six miles from Pengley, Mrs. Talbot was quite eager that "Poor

Phœbe" should be sent for at once, and come and stay "two months at the least" with them. The conspiracy was entered into eagerly; and Livy became a perfect ringleader; as Mr. Talbot put it, the Colonel was to be snaffled and not let out of the country with his life. The regiment was sure to be there two years at least; so there was time to form a splendid plan, and from their little rifle pit they might securely plan attack after attack, sally after sally, until the enemy grew weary and laid down his arms.

Not very much success had hitherto crowned their united efforts; indeed, Phœbe's good allies held privately small hopes, and Mrs. Talbot often owned to her husband "that there was no doing anything for Phœbe," whose second affair this was. Latterly, however, some curious signs had been noticed about the Colonel, which

made the assailants redouble their efforts. Our Livy had also noted other signs; she was very far seeing and penetrating, but she was too delicate to reveal what she suspected. The shrewd reader will think she anticipates what is to be told, but may be warned here she is mistaken. Colonel Labouchere, C.B., liked, as everybody did, but did not "admire" as it is called, our heroine.

Mrs. Talbot was sitting on the sofa as they entered, in her afternoon *toilette*, for she dressed at home pretty much as they would do at a fashionable watering-place, and she knew that this strict discipline of herself insured certain discipline, respect, and admiration in others. The attitude as she entered was a model of grace, not, perhaps, affected for that occasion, but habit and repetition had given her natural ease. She was reading.

One of Talbot's published "compositions," as it is only courtesy to call them, was open on the piano, and the hint was conveyed that she had been practising it.

"I suppose it is time to go and dress, Beauty," she said, for he liked the title now, "Phœbe has been at work an hour ago."

"Poor Phœbe," said he, "what is it to be?—the crimson, or the yellow, or the blue?"

"No, we must turn her out in white, I shall take care of that. But what am I to put on? You must settle for me."

The Beauty became reflective, as if he had been asked to make up a sum of money, or to divide one set of fractions by another, which indeed he could not have done.

"Yes," he said, "for they have got hold

of the Northfleets, and some nice people, *she*,"—an allusion to Lady Northfleet,—"has wonderful taste and finery. So I must ask you both to do your best, and look as well as you can for the credit of the house."

"We'll not disgrace you, Beauty dear," said Livy. The two ladies passed out to their important duty, and Mr. Talbot, with a soft sigh, which seemed to say, "All is on my elegant shoulders, and I must think of everything for them," lounged carelessly to the piano, on whose chords he laid his elegant fingers. It was rather an unfortunate thing for his house and his friends, when he took to "composition," or rather to publication of his compositions. The bill for engraving, advertisements, &c., was heavy; and there was to be read in the papers something like this:—

"Mr. Albert Talbot's New Song: 'He gave one look at parting;' Words and Music by Albert Talbot, Esq., Author of 'His arching mouth and dimpled smile,' —'Cara-Cole Valse,' &c."

The real publication consisted in the distribution of copies as presents. It was Mrs. Talbot who got Miss Ivors, her young friend, who had really a fine voice, to practise and learn, "He gave one look at parting," overcoming the young lady's scruples as to what she called "such curious words, you know." But Talbot was "difficult." He was now trying it himself in his rather feminine voice. As he played and warbled, the subdued light from a lamp played on that little round room, which was the essence of comfort and snugness, and on which, indeed, Mrs. Talbot had spared no money to make comfortable. Bookcases ran round,

and gave it an air of coziness, rich pictures, warm carpets, elegant little tables, "snug" chairs, and all manner of pleasant and convenient trifles. It was, indeed, a cozy house, old, but made cozier by alterations and additions. The very lobbies were rooms, and furnished as rooms. The hall was another room; the whole was compact and tight, and nestled in a green corner under shelter.

Mr. Talbot soon got tired of his song; but an idea for a new one occurred to him, which he began to work out on the notes, *his* way of composition, though he mysteriously seemed to convey to friends that he had mastered thorough bass and harmony, and "scored away" at his desk. Whatever he wrote, a devouring craze for publishing seized him. He used to get quite delighted with his "thoughts;" but now the three ladies in

splendid raiment rustled in like queens, and surprised him at his task.

"We shall be late, Beauty dear," said Livy, anxiously.

He was put out at being interrupted, and rose pettishly. He was a little of a child still.

"You must hurry, you know," said his wife; "we have a long way to drive."

Mr. Talbot took nearly an hour for his regular festive toilette. On this occasion he was quicker. The carriage is at the door, glistening, with the steps down, and the three ladies are getting in. Beauty Talbot comes last, in exquisitely made clothes, that some way show the shape of his ancles and limbs; and delicately scented. Then folds himself up, as it were, and insinuates himself into a crevice among them, more fearful than they of being

crushed. The door is shut to, and away they drive briskly for The Towers.

Talbot's history was a little curious. Nearly every one said he had married too early; a few, that he had thrown himself away; which, translated, often means that it is the other who has been thrown away.

CHAPTER III.

"BEAUTY" TALBOT.

As they drive, then, at this smart pace over stones and hillocks, we may just look back a little, as Mr. Talbot does often at the country behind from his seat, and sometimes does in his study, at the earlier country of his life.

When twenty years old, Albert Talbot was a very handsome creature indeed; pale, soft, languishing, of delicate colour, with the darkest, glossiest hair, which would have gone into ringlets had he allowed it; and when he was set off with deep velvets and rich purple tints, was nearly as much admired by others as he

was by himself. He was known by his friends as "Beauty" Talbot, an epithet which did not at all displease him, though it hinted at effeminacy.

Beauty Talbot did well at the university —was found to have brains, which disappointed the stupid men who were fond of sneering at his fair skin; and when he left college, coming of a gentlemanly stock, found himself in the very best society. He was very well off "for a young man," his father having about eighteen hundred a year, and no other children and many good connections. A profession was thought of for a time; but the one he chose—and, let it be remembered, it is often more profitable than others—was Country Houses. This he embraced with ardour. He became "spread,"—*répandu*, as the French put it. This delightful, charming, interesting creature, with the

sweet voice and lovely hands, could not be done without anywhere. His liquid eyes and delicate skin committed deadly havoc among the virgins and matrons. He sang, and played upon the piano. He did not shoot, and did not care for hunting, though he hunted "like a man." The materials used in Beauty Talbot's profession were chiefly hair-brushes. The display of these articles was really magnificent. He might have exhibited those gorgeous instruments at South Kensington: massive tooth-brushes, which it was a pleasure to feel and wield; exqusite monograms; crest in raised gold, mediæval touch. They lay, when not in use, or on their travels, in a blue morocco case, expressly constructed for their reception, nestling, in silk. They cost a fortune. Truefitt's bill indeed was serious; his "ess. bouquet" was ordered in gallons. A lovely

youth; "Endymion was nothing to him," an envious ugly friend remarked; and sure to do well in the profession he had chosen.

It was amazing the advantage Beauty Talbot had over other men at any innings he took in the game of society. Other men had to exert themselves—it was all done for him. For some objects ladies are privileged to show their preference in an almost indecent way. They said openly they were quite in love with Beauty Talbot, and his lovely eyes, and smooth skin —things they would have "died" sooner than have remarked in the great manly Captain Bushe, or Mr Barron, with the huge luxuriant fox-coloured beard. He seemed to have the privileges of little boys of tender years, who are admitted to bathe with ladies.

And so he fluttered for a year or two, from house to house, literally doing what

he pleased—bringing about his noble hair-brushes, his violet, his mauve, his velvet, his pumps and scarlet stockings, his fine hands and his lisp. He played little waltzes on the piano, *composed* by himself, with quite a feminine touch. He composed little ballads to French words, which any young woman was only too proud to copy out, learn, and sing for him; and yet more transported to hear him sing, in his warble-chirrup. The fox-bearded men, sometimes contemptuously put aside by him, were, in their own slang, "fit to be tied." "Where are his petticoats?" they would say. "A creature that I could just take up between my thumb and finger and squeeze as I would an insect. And his saucy airs!"

One Christmas, Beauty Talbot was asked down to a great house for the festivities of the season. Oxberry Hall was full to

over-flowing. Lady Oxberry said,—"Positively, if my dear Cupid wasn't coming, I'd give up the whole thing." Great men and great women were to be there—a Cabinet Minister, to go out cock-shooting; a bishop, not of the real sort, "one of the colonial creatures, my dear," said Lady Oxberry; various supernumeraries of society, who are wanted to fill up the stage, and give cues for the greater actors. Among others came the daughter of the late Lord Langrishe. The Honourable Eva had fine hair, golden, a fine complexion and presence, and was a fine girl generally.

"But, my dear," said Lady Oxberry, in her own deliciously special manner, "that woman has hacked and worked about the world more than one of those navvies you see on the railway. Try her on Homburg, Baden, Harrogate, Scarborough, Brighton, *even Jersey*, my dear, though

she won't own to it; but *I* know it from a sure source. There was a man there, and they followed him. She could write a guide-book, that woman. Scandalous!"

Lady Oxberry never said "girl," and she could give us a splendid catalogue of the various human types. Yet to the woman herself Lady Oxberry spoke softly — as "Eva dearest," which Eva dearest knew perfectly did not mean hypocrisy, and accepted as being about as conventional as the "ever sincerely yours" of a letter. The description was quite accurate, indeed, rather undercoloured. Not the barrister grinding till three in the morning, and exhausting himself in court to "carry a case," could slave harder than she did to carry hers, and win a matrimonial verdict. But she was unfortunate, cast after cast was a failure; and a reputation for failures brought fresh failures. It is well known

that the most skilful captain, if he be unlucky, is shunned; and thus the years had gone by—or, rather, stolen by, as, alas! they will do, during the third and fourth decade of our lives. It began to be said, with enjoyment, that the Honourable Eva was "pretty well on, you know, now;" and the fatal word "*passée*" was being heard. Younger soldiers were rudely pushing by her to the front, muttering that she was stopping the promotion, and ought to retire. She herself was losing the *élan* with which she had so often maintained the fight, and was doing duty now more from habit and mechanical exertion.

In this state of things she found herself at Oxberry, and, for the first time, met Beauty Talbot. That youth had never seen her, and was much struck by her mature charms. She was, indeed, a fine creature still, as many a soldier pronounced.

To the Beauty she herself was not indifferent; and, having made some necessary inquiries, determined to get ready the old well-worn gear—the brown, torn nets, let down over the side so often, and through which so many a plump and noble fish had broken—once more.

Lady Oxberry was in a good-natured vein, and co-operated without giving herself much trouble. A lady of the house, who is favourable, is, like cavalry in battle, a truly valuable arm. She had daughters, too, just going to step down into the circus; and it was no harm to get a rival horsewoman out of the way.

Beauty was accordingly judiciously rallied and complimented—not on *his* preference, but on *hers* for him, a far more artful proceeding. As at the close of a season, Messrs. Howell and James, "clearing off stock," will take any reasonable

offer for what at the beginning they disdainfully refused you, so the Honourable Eva made up her mind that a good looking youth, so much her junior, and in possession of some fifteen hundred a-year, was really highly desirable, and far preferable to an inglorious solitude.

It came about at last. Had it been proposed seriously and suddenly to the Beauty he would have taken flight, and perhaps taken post and fled miles from Oxberry. But the great, hulking man, with the fox-coloured beard, who had the bitterest contempt for Beauty, unconsciously contributed. He was never weary, was Dick Barron, of 'chaffing' the youth, who was not unsuccessful in his replies. Perhaps he had a lurking admiration himself for the Honourable Eva; but his favourite tone was infinite amusement at the notion of that 'china figure' inspiring any liking in any lady.

"See here, Beauty," he would say, in the smoking room; "they think about you, very much as they do about the little urchins that are allowed to bathe with the grown-up ladies—that is, they don't think about you *at all.*"

"You have vulgar ideas, Barron," the Beauty would answer, calmly; "not to say coarse. You picked up that in your savage travels."

"That's neither here nor there; but what I say is, the folly of a fellow like you thinking women would take you up seriously as they would other men. You know the way they put little Tommy on their knees, not that I mean that they'd do that to *you;* but I mean all this means nothing with *you.* Now Beauty thinks, because all the women pet him, as they do the white poodle upstairs, that they are all in love with him. And that girl Lan-

grishe, I'll bet any sum, he thinks is pining away for him."

The other smiled good-humouredly. "I never make bets about ladies; I don't think any gentleman should. I don't think you know much what you are talking about."

"Beauty knows what he's doing," said another gentleman; indeed Eva having no mamma, or brother, or father alive, was always spoken of like a 'man,' "and the Langrishe may have a sneaking kindness for him after all. Women are queer cattle."

"And men," said Beauty, "seem to be very coarse fishes. I'm tired of the subject. Let us change it."

But Big Barron was not, and came back to it very often. In his lumbering way it seemed to him something of a joke, in which department he was but poorly furnished, and had to make up by repeti-

tion for variety. There are many men of this sort, who require a butt of some sort to bring out their dormant humour; and this stupid fellow harped on this poor topic *ad nauseam* almost. Old Dick Lumley—who will appear by-and-by—could have told the whole story minutely

The Oxberry festivities went on bravely. There was a ball and dancing, and on one night a play, in which all the ladies took a part. The leading character, "Helen of Troy," fell, as of right, to Miss Langrishe, whose golden hair was splendidly in keeping. For that night she made what the envious called a vigorous rally, and by enormous exertion, by artistic decoration, exquisite dress, and enforced animation of feature, succeeded in reducing her age, just as a jockey in training would his weight, to about eighteen. It was a wonderful *tour de force;* but the human will, when

concentrated, will perform still greater marvels. Nearly every one was delighted, and people who saw her for the first time thought her "perfectly lovely," Female rivals—who knew all the details, how every touch was done, "who could tell real lace from false" in a glance, and but too often, when their passions interposed, pronounced real lace mere imitation—the sniffs and sneers of these disdainful partisans through that eventful evening were indeed trying, but they did not touch her; for rejuvenescent the whole night, she was borne on one triumphant tide of success. She had the public of the place with her. When you have the public with you on any occasion, you may despise enemies, snarlers, and even critics; and with her she had her own admirer, squire, and *clacqueur*, Beauty Talbot.

Festival nights of this sort, when

there are lights, enthusiasm, gaudiness, and a general halo over everybody and everything, are specially dangerous for the cautious man and the half-professional "flirt"—odious term! used here with apology—who would go on his road reaping all the enjoyment and delights, which others, more honourable, also seek, but attended with graver responsibilities. In that glare, the ardent and dazzling glow, the barley-sugar barriers which fence his resolutions thaw and droop down into a universal solvence, he is carried away in a rush, overleaping that sticky barrier, and too often cannot undo the night's work. So it was to be with our Beauty—the ladies' pet—already predisposed. She seemed radiant, lovely even, and there was a gentle languor, a pensive melancholy, a confidence for him, and him only, that was in itself attractive.

It was at the end of the third act that she came to him in hysterical tears. She could hardly tell him the cause of her trouble. The place opened on a garden, and seriously he begged of her to come out into the cool air. Then the mature Eva told him, that as she passed by the wing, she had heard her enemy—that cruel, unkind Mr. Barron—making his remarks on her,—dark, cutting, ungenerous speeches. Oh, so cruel——"

"A coarse, ill-bred fellow," said the other, excited; "but I have long intended to bring him to account, and now——"

"Not for the world! not for the world!"

There was perfect truth in this. The unconscious giant, lounging against the scene, his hands in his pockets, was criticising the leading actress with a caustic

and yet indifferent severity, which he little dreamed she overheard. It was some such expression as this :—

"The ancient is getting through the work amazingly. She must have been practising at a gymnasium all last week." Gentlemen *do* talk thus indelicately among themselves.

On such a night it seemed doubly coarse, and besides quite ridiculously untrue and out of nature. Beauty Talbot could not resist the influences of a dramatic situation. There is a pleasant sweetness and luxury in such a moment, which we may defy the coldest and most calculating pundit of us all to resist. He had that chivalry in him which is "youth." In short, before they left that garden he was enrolled—solemnly sworn her champion and defender. The tears were dried by the delicate fingers of the Beauty,

holding the most exquisite cambric. The performance went on triumphantly to the end. But in the smoking-room that night, when the hulking Barron was recommencing his one stale topic, the Beauty interposed and said, quietly,—

"You must stop all that now, Barron. I can't stand by and suffer any more of that language. I give you fair warning."

"And why, pray?" said the other, good humouredly.

Then the Beauty told him. And, in justice to the rough Barron, it must be said that he seized the womanly hand, wrung it warmly, and poured out many excuses and hearty congratulations.

But with the next day came the cold grey of the morning. It was like walking across a stage at eight o'clock of a November day after the glorious *début*

of a prima donna. The Beauty awoke, as it were. The change for him, indeed, was the suddenest and strangest; ladies looked on him curiously, as if he had been transformed in the night. He was reduced to being a private. It was believed he would have committed suicide; but there was no escape. Unlucky as that sportswoman had been, in her gentle art—indifferent Waltonian—once she had something on her line, she was not likely to let it go. The marriage was speedily "arranged," as it is called, and the Beauty was (perhaps, literally) led to the altar.

With this alliance began, of course, quite a new life for Beauty Talbot. The name he never lost, though it was applied more from the wish to avoid the trouble of unlearning anything, which the public always dislikes. He was said to be fairly

broken-in; but a greater change came over the Honourable Mrs. Talbot. It has been mentioned that she really liked the Beauty; and she seemed to her friends, from the hour of her marriage, to have put on quite a new character. She really flung away the old arms—for armour she wore none, as she was only too willing to receive a wound—with delight. She was sick of the old campaigning and skirmishing and the trenches, and was delighted to retire thus on full pay. She genuinely laid herself out to be domestic, and to make the Beauty contented and happy—a task of surprising difficulty; for he was by no means weary of the trenches, and literally pined for what Barron had called being "petted among the ladies," like a little boy of tender years. He moped and mused; it was the air he had

breathed. What was to become of him? He would sicken and die. Perhaps he had sacrificed himself; perhaps he was lost and undone for ever. The enemies and rivals, who never forgave her, were not indisposed to encourage this tone. She had committed one of the unpardonable sins. They were never weary of shooting their little arrows, tipped with a venomous poison, which festered and irritated. The poison was, "that woman and her boy," on which the changes were rung. Yet nothing could have been more unfair. There was about ten or twelve years between them; and she looked not very much older. But that majority was on the wrong side; and she was unwearied in her efforts to atone for it.

Firstly, she took him to travel for two years, wisely judging it prudent to remove him from those who were his

old friends and her old enemies. This answered very fairly for a time, until they got to Paris, and then to some of the fashionable watering-places, where the good looks of the Beauty found him some admirers. She had then to remove him home, and she took a small house in London, where she began seriously to devise and cogitate how she was to employ him. After much trouble and toil she got him a place, that was at once genteel and out of mischief, in the Palace, on what was called the Board of Green Cloth, with not much to do and not much salary. It suited him exactly. He was thrown with some "nice" people—was in a good atmosphere. But it would be endless to record the unwearied arts of this singular woman at home to secure her influence. For there was besides a *simplicity* in the Beauty,

under all his follies, which attracted, and under good training, would have made him, in the conventional phrase, a useful member of society; and a good nature, which exhibited itself where his own interest was not very directly concerned.

The result, however, was, that these laborious arts bore fruit, and he at last, after a faint struggle, and by the judicious removal and fencing off of all temptation, began to fall completely under the influence of his wife. Not that he was conscious of this, in the least, and believed he had a strong mind and "a will of his own." Her "arts," as will be seen, were all directed to the aim of maintaining that influence, and of hiding from him the ravages of the cruel enemy, Time. He was taught—it was forced upon him—to believe that she was superior to most women: so

elegant and refined, and with the true style; and some really good-natured old friends of hers co-operated. One of these Samaritans, whom we shall see presently, Mr. Lumley, whom the Beauty looked up to amazingly, did wonders in this direction. It was impossible, indeed, not to feel sympathy for such unwearied efforts. She certainly had the art of dress—had also the art of keeping her hair, her colour, her eyes, and of concealing that art.

But it would have all broken down after a few years, but for a new and more powerful ally that began to move upon the scene. The pretty heroine of this story had come into the world, was growing up, from a piquant infant into a pretty and delightful little girl, wearing a blue cloak and straw hat, and with her dark hair tumbling about her in curls

as she cantered along by the seaside on a high-spirited donkey, laughing with enjoyment, and making the heart of the school-boy, who looked after her, ache for long after. As she glided on from ten years old to fifteen, from fifteen to eighteen, the troubled mother found her a wonderful and far more skilful assistant. Her devices were inexhaustible, and infinitely more original. She made it all secure; and though the paternal heart was not bubbling over with affections or doating on her, she was irresistible in her way. The jewel of that household was Miss Livy.

Thus do we find them, on the evening she came down from town, and drove her ponies from the station, her young father-brother sitting beside her. How often she wished things could go on so for ever. They were so happy—

her brother-father so young and pleasant, mamma so tranquil, life so enjoyable. Alas! that the great wain of time should be hurrying down an incline with a gathering velocity. There are pleasant epochs in life, when the sense of tranquil felicity is so keen, we should wish the break put on, and all things to stop—for a time at least. Their little pleasant house, and the delightful little interior, where they were all so happy together—there was no reason "in life" why things should not go on. The faith and purpose of these two women could at least secure that. The passiveness of Beauty Talbot made everything the more secure. He was so "broken in," so trained now, he could be trusted among whole flocks of ladies. Such is the text—the *carte de pays;* it will not be difficult to follow out the sermon.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAN OF MONEY.

While the Talbots are driving swiftly to this party, we may take a glance at their host, Richard Hardman, Esq., now on his rug, in a senatorial attitude.

A low, coarse fellow. But "lords" and "people of that sort," found him quite another description of man. They always said that "Hardman was a shrewd clever man of the world, whose opinion on any subject was worth money." He was pushing and forward; but it was impossible not to respect a person who had raised himself "from the very dregs," whatever they were, and could hold his

own with any of the moneyed men of the kingdom. You asked him to meet a number of men of rank, and men of intellect, and it was impossible to pass over Hardman, who, in a quiet way "held his own," and did not obtrude any of the vulgar "I could buy and sell *you*," —the syllogism on every subject, to which men of his class reduce all reasoning. The host would whisper, "That's Hardman, at the end of the table, a shrewd, clear-sighted City man; began with nothing, made his money out of his brain, perfect man of the world, long-headed to a degree."

It is surprising the respect with which noble persons thus regard intelligent men of this sort, who do not represent the mere *animal* type of wealth, as it may be called, and which is a chuckling, selfish, good-for-nothing type; but who

are sufficiently deferential and even obsequious, and, it is to be feared, can give a sort of return in the shape of a rare and useful bit of information Citywards, which may be turned into money. For the aristocrats of the kingdom are not above receiving "information" in other matters, as well as in the racing. A startling truth was stated not long ago, that "the Irish were now the most stingy race in the kingdom," and it is a *pendant* for that truth that the "noble" persons of our kingdom have a certain greed of "low" money, and an eagerness for getting it, that is inconceivable. Mr. Hardman, shrewd fellow that he was, took due account of this foible, and turned it to his own profit.

About Richard Hardman was often asked the question, "Who was he?" That almost ungrammatical question, and

one of the audacious ellipses in the language,—stands for a whole biography. But here again Mr. Hardman was exceptional. We hear of a Chancellor of England who was a bedmaker, or a scrivener, or some such thing; of peers who swept a warehouse. These are matters of just pride, as in the case of Mr. Bounderby, boasting of the hedge as that four-post bed under whose shelter he was born. But somehow no one "raked up" these things in Mr. Hardman's instance. The mystery was, no one knew anything, and yet each human figure has its place in the universe, filling up a certain space, comes in contact with a number of people, and must be noted and recollected. At the police courts, the jailors and warders remember Mr. Sykes, as having been under their charge so many years ago.

Some one once stated that Richard Hardman's father had kept a shop in some particular town. But there was no evidence. Who would believe it now? There was the man himself, a millionaire, as it was believed. "A perfect gentleman, I assure you. So intelligent, so shrewd, it is quite a pleasure to talk to him." They were not above consulting him on their little, mean, miserable ventures, just as at the German gambling places, we see noble ladies and gentlemen on the strangest terms of familiarity with blackleg gamblers, looking on them with awe and respect.

But it was with ladies, and in ladies' society that Mr. Hardman "showed the cloven hoof" as it is called,—rather exhibited those huge clodhopper hobnailed brogues—symbols of his low vulgarity, and which he unconsciously brought into

the drawing-room, and put up on the sofa and cushions. Here it was that he revealed himself; no training, no purchased education of dinner-giving, or dinner-going, could impart that nice and delicate tact, that bloom which is not to be taught, that "gentleness"—not of blood, but of mind—which is based upon what is considerate, and the feelings of others. This he had not acquired, and never would acquire, and with the best intentions he was perpetually making some blunder, which he would have been delighted to have been allowed to repair in a fashion like this, to take the person aside and say, "My dear sir (or lady), here is a little cheque, which I hope you will let me press on you; you will really oblige me!"

But for real persons of quality,—the high-bred sort, so composed, so confident

and immovable in their proud position,—the calm, tranquil, refined ladies of birth and title, who spoke in a sweet, low, but cold voice, whose eye rested on him with an inquiring, half-indifferent, half-contemptuous way, these seemed as far above him as the angels, whom he read of pompously each Sunday in his prayer-book—("reduced sort of people, who, for that matter, he might buy and sell") —for them he languished; in their every movement and action he saw grace and perfection.

When he first came to this neighbourhood, Mrs. Talbot thus impressed him. She was the true style—had the true, almost contemptuous insolence. For her acquaintance he actually languished; and it was indeed a day of great joy, when that "call" was made. Her refined presence seemed to pervade that gaudy

and "spick and span" house like a perfume. In that gaudy gold and silver, overloaded drawing-room, she was like the pearl or diamond in the forehead of the staringly-coloured idol. He would, did society tolerate it, have abased himself on the carpet, taken that charming foot, *à la* Man Friday, and placed it upon his head.

His great stout wife this enchanting presence did not at all affect in the same way; she was as gratified, but hers was quite a different department of "snobbishness;" and, in truth, quite as low as her husband. She was less vulgar-minded, in a sense. She assumed herself to be "as good as any of them," and accepted such a visit as homage to their great wealth and condition. Her husband looked down on her as thus wanting in refinemement; and thus his

"vulgarity" was the lowest in degree of the two.

On the morning of that auspicious visit, Mr. Hardman was fortunately "within;" so, too, was his wife, but not his daughter Rose. We may dwell a little on this scene, as it will illustrate that strange yet interesting "formation," the soul that has become calcareous, or ossified, by money. After all, such a character followed with the finger along all its windings and lines, is as interesting and as full of surprises as a course of incidents itself. It is, besides, the very turning-point of this little narrative, and brought about a very strange relation between the two families.

Mrs. Talbot had an object in this visit, which will be seen later. She was not indisposed to find them a little useful. She admired, in a dubious way, the

splendour of the drawing-room, praising the richness of the *fabrics*, the treasures of gold, &c., but saying nothing of the way these things were combined. The walls, a blazing salmon and gold, were hung round with pictures "of the modern school," by those eminent painters, "Twelve hundred" or "Two thousand;" for the owner dwelt with infinitely more admiration on those prices than on the humble "fellow" who had laid on the colours. He had succeeded in getting the worst specimen of the masters—gaudy costly failures of a subject, which the painter himself excused to his friends.

"Oh, yes, a thing I did as an experiment. One of the manufacturing men came bothering me to let him have it, so I put in as much colour as I could for the money. A dreadful thing, sir! but done to order."

In this grateful way is sheer *money* spoken of.

With her glass Mrs. Talbot surveyed these treasures. Suddenly at a corner she came upon a little cabinet picture, by a humble French artist—one of his favourite *genre* pieces — a "Game of Chess," in the Meissonier style—bright, clear, firm, and exquisitely finished.

"Ah! that!" said Mr. Hardman; "it's not worthy of the situation. I am ashamed that you should have seen it, Mrs. Talbot; a nice little thing in its way, and good for a beginner."

"A beginner!" she said; "and who did it, pray?"

"Oh, it's a fancy of my daughter's, and shall be cashiered at once. An humble French fellow that died. We took him up a little."

"I cannot tell you how I admire

it," she said; "it is by far the best. In fact, the others cannot compare to it."

She was nearly right; for she had the *débris* of a good early taste. Besides, she was not sorry in a gentle way to take down this monetary arrogance. He was amazed— confused rather.

"Oh, it is good," he said, looking into it. "Great promise. I always said so."

"Promise!" she repeated, smiling. "That was long before—this is performance!"

"Ah, hah! very good, Mrs. Talbot. So cleverly said. Worthy of the House!"

"You don't pay compliments, I see," she answered, quietly. "Now, I tell you, Mr. Hardman, this is the prettiest thing I have seen for years, and any real artist will tell you so. It is worth any money."

"You don't say so, Mrs. Talbot?"

said he, getting out his glasses, and staring it all over, as if looking for the words "any money." "I declare it *is* good—uncommonly good. Unpretending, you know; and now that you say so, *really* good. It has merit."

Mrs. Talbot showed almost disgust at this patronage. He read in her face quite plainly, "You don't know what you are talking about, low man that you are!" "It is worth your collection put together. I don't mean in money, but for pleasing." She swept away with that delicious "high-bred smile," and left Mr. Hardman half pleased, half uncomfortable. His daughter now came in, and found him ruminating.

"Mrs. Talbot has just been here," he said, in a sort of lofty, chamberlain way, and a tacit intimation,—"See what I do for you. Where would you all be but for

me?" A hint which he conveyed in the most insufferably arrogant way at every hour of the day.

"I say, Mrs. Talbot has paid us a visit. I say a very affable, nice sort of person, whom I wish you, Rose, to cultivate. You hear?"

"Affable?" said Rose, coldly. "She has not been patronising us?"

"Folly! You cannot understand the difference between civility and the deference paid to a person of fortune that one is anxious to make a friend of."

"More anxious to come and laugh at us," said Rose, her lip curling. "I know what these sort of people are, and what they stoop to do, with all their good blood and gentility. They will do mean things, as I have seen."

"Oh, ridiculous!" said Mr. Hardman, much put out. "You are thinking of

what you saw of those people in Ireland. The Irish are paupers, high and low. I could buy and sell the richest among them, fifty times over."

"So you could the Talbots, papa. Take my advice," she added, going up to him: "just take her advances for what they are worth. I have heard some of her history, and know what she is perfectly. We shall be much more respectable and respected if we keep to our own set. Let them, if they like, court us; but for God's sake, let us not be seen courting them, or currying a smile from a woman that will ask you to amuse her friends, if she ask at all."

"You are a mere fool!" said Mr. Hardman, in a rage; "utterly ignorant. You have no more sense than that dog. Besides, I will not take any lecturing. It's insulting. Don't speak to me; don't make

such speeches to me. It's infernal disrespectful."

"I mean it for your good, father; and if I have said anything wrong—"

"You have. Mean things for your own good! I know what is thought of me in the county, and over England too, and I won't be interfered with, if I choose to assert the position I am entitled to. Here, you! send round the carriage at once."

The carriage came round.

"Where is Miller?" (the duke's coachman.)

He was told he had to go into the town about "the bad oats." Mr. Hardman threw back his head haughtily, as if about to scold, but recollected himself. The duke's coachman was in the habit of giving warning if he was found fault with even in his absence. ("I 'ear, sir, that you expressed yourself as dissatisfied," &c.)

"Bring down that picture carefully, now; it is of great value." He then drove away, the magnificent steeds ("cost me," &c.) striding out at a good pace.

Rose, wandering back listlessly into the drawing-room, noticed the blank space, and asked what had become of her dear and favourite picture. The answer was, "Master had taken it away in the carriage."

That evening Mr. Hardman sat in the great swinging chamber he called his carriage, in a haughty, "arms-folded" way, as though there were people opposite watching him. Instead of such spectators, was the picture of "The Chess Players," in its gilt frame, leaning against the cushions. The frame gave him some uneasiness; it was not broad, nor rich enough.

"It was a pity," he thought, "there

was not time to get more gold on; but there was nothing like striking when the iron was hot."

The great coach turning up to the modest red-brick house, he got out, was told Mrs. Talbot was at home. and then said, loftily,—

"Be careful in bringing that picture in; it is of value."

It was carried in, and maids—and, *perhaps*, some of higher station looking from lofty eyries in the roof—wondered what this meant. Mr. Talbot himself, passing through the little hall, saw a picture on a chair, and read the solution at once.

Miss Livy was in the drawing-room, and with her bright, beaming face welcomed the man of money cordially. To her he was obsequious, though he fancied she had not the true "high-bred

touch" of her mother—that *latent contempt* which he so admired, yet dreaded.

"Mamma," she said, with animation, "had gone to see him that very morning."

Mr. Hardman (loftily) knew that perfectly. He had had the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Talbot.

Then entered Mrs. Talbot, with a curious look on her face, something rather hard and severe—as it were, giving warning to the visitor,—

"Take care now what you are going to do."

There was, besides, a perplexing interrogatory,—

"What *can* you want with me?"

It made Mr. Hardman nervous, he could not explain how; and at every diversion he made, this cold look was still on him asking, pertinently,—

"Now, please, what do you want?"

At last he was brought to the point rather awkwardly, for Beauty himself—who had been "composing" at the piano, and was much put out at the long interruption—came in.

"I say," he said, "where on earth did that picture in the hall come from—two men playing chess?"

Mrs. Talbot looked very stern.

"Playing chess!"

Mr. Hardman now wished he had left it at home.

"The truth is," he said, "you so admired it, and did me the honour of praising it so much, that——"

The cold eyes were on him.

"Yes, Mr. Hardman; that——"

"That I thought—"—he went on, with a poor attempt at a flourish—"I could not do better than venture to present it to one who—who——"

Here he stopped; the cold face was too much. The Beauty did not know what to say, though not displeased at the House receiving anything.

"Oh, dear, no," said she, decidedly; "*that* would be out of the question. Oh! I never—— However, it was very kind of you to bring it over, because I should like Mr. Talbot to see it, whose criticism will agree with mine, I am sure."

A servant brought in the picture, and it was admired. The stupid man did not seize on the friendly plank thus thrown to him, but became bold again.

"Oh, you must take it, Mrs. Talbot; I insist on it now. No ceremony with us."

Mrs. Talbot looked at him with something like scorn.

"I said, Mr. Hardman, that it was out of the question; I never take pre-

sents, except under circumstances. You must excuse us, indeed." She smiled on him, as if she was saying something complimentary. "Shall I ring for them to take it away? It is so heavy, is it not?"

Beauty Talbot admired the way his wife performed all this—as, indeed, she intended that he should. Clever woman, he thought; but with such a delicate way of doing the thing.

Mr. Hardman got up, very hot and miserable—much hurt, as he showed by his glowing face.

"Oh, no matter," he said; "I assure you the picture is a good one, and you have a loss of it. However, it is no matter in the world—none at all."

"I am so much obliged to you, Mr. Hardman," Mrs. Talbot went on, with a languidly amused air. "I am sure it

was too good of you to come up with it."

"Oh, don't mention it," he said, anxious to get away, and buttoning his coat tightly. There is nothing so humiliating as having to take a thing back.

And Mr. Hardman was savage as he strode down the steps, his picture carried in front. He flung himself back in his carriage and fumed. As he had not the duke's coachman driving, he could vent himself—his head out of the window,—

"Is that the way to treat my horses, sir? You don't know *how* to drive, sir."

Entering the house, his picture carried before him, he came full on his daughter.

"I knew she wouldn't take it, papa. Why didn't you consult me?"

Nothing is so aggravating, even for a good temper, as being thus surprised

at so humiliating a moment. An army in a rout, hurrying along its baggage, is not in a humour to be "brought to book." Hardman answered her angrily:—

"Am I to take you into my confidence? I do what I choose."

"You shouldn't have done this, father. She would have delighted in mortifying us, and be glad of the opportunity. She will call us vulgar and low. And to offer a present to a person you have seen only once or twice—we deserve such a rebuff."

"This is outrageous!" said her father, turning on her, and making his voice resound though the house. "Am I master here? Who pays for everything in this house? And am I to be dictated to in this way? Damn it!" (For, scraping the thin coating of civilisation,

we come on the common workman, with oaths, &c.) "I'll not put up with it! Insulted this way, right and left! Don't speak to me, girl. I, that have raised you out of the mud;—only for me you'd be a common, trolloping——."

She gave him such a look of contempt, and turned from him with a "For shame!"

He was not displeased. He had had the best of *that*, and retired into his den. Strange to say, he was in a greater fury with his daughter than with Mrs. Talbot. He admired and respected, while he ground his teeth. How he would give the world to have that art. How much would he not pay down for it—a cheque for a large amount; but he knew it was hopeless. Even at his business, with inferiors—wretched dependants—he could not compass it. He

could "abuse them," and be insulting also, as he could be overbearing to men his own equals; but he could not attain that courteous, stinging, placid shape of deadly offence. He felt no wish to punish her or revenge himself in any way; but he could not forgive his daughter for *having known more than he did*, and for having foretold what he could not foretell. This is often the heaviest of crimes. Thus he sat in his parlour glowering at people, and enemies who were not present.

This was shortly before the night when the first chapter of this little history opens—in fact, within ten days; and a man on horseback had ridden up to the red brick house, with a despatch, wherein "Mr. and Mrs. Richard Hardman request the honour of Mr. and Mrs. Talbot at dinner, on Monday, the —th, at half-past eight o'clock." He was very forgiving.

CHAPTER V.

A DINNER AT THE TOWERS.

The Towers, where the Hardmans lived, had belonged to the Tilley family, before Sir John had been obliged, from unsuccessful horse-racing, to sell the place and go abroad. It was a great red barrack of a house, with yellow copings and edgings, and white stone flower-pots on the top. The monetary soul of the rich man hungered for this place, and fancied it, when it came into the market, because "it had belonged to the Baronet." He already heard himself saying, in answer to some guest's inquiry, "Yes, I got this place when

the Tilleys broke up—Sir John, you know. I gave him a fine price for it. I lunched with him in this room, and he had his hands under my feet. 'I am a beggar,' he said; 'don't be hard on me.' 'No, Sir John,' I replied. 'I'll draw a cheque for the sum you wish.'"

This was the Hardman version—true in a literal way; but it was said, on the other hand, that the rich man had screwed and haggled, and wanted this in, and that in, and all the while kept off other purchasers. This, however may have been exaggeration; for the stories about Hardman were endless, and every one could contribute something about his arrogance, his "parvenu-ishness," and innate meanness of soul; for he had not bought or paid for tact, to hide these odious blemishes. A different

compliment to the well-known one paid to Mr. Burke could be paid to him; for you could not stand five minutes under an archway with him during a shower, without in some way getting the impression that he was one of the most offensive of men. There would be something in the way he handled his umbrella, or the way he would look out on the weather, as if it was some low "poor" creature that was coming in his road. He was giving these dinners, in the fancy that he was growing popular, but found far more secret pleasure in showing off his coarse magnificence. Mrs. Hardman was about as vulgar as he was, with an apparatus besides of noddings and bendings, which she took for graciousness and condescension. But they had a son and daughter who, strange to say, seemed wholly of another pattern. They did

not reflect the coarseness of mind, or manner of their sire and mamma. The daughter we have seen.

The Talbot carriage met several others returning as it rolled up the avenue. The door was open, and a blaze of light was shed forth, in which sheen appeared, standing as archangels of the household, the menials, in the Hardman canary colour and blue. During dinner more will be heard about these gentry. The procession went up the "grand stair," and was sung into the drawing-room, which was already pretty full.

Mr. Hardman came from off the rug—the royal tabaret, as it were—with his face still turned towards an old-fashioned gentleman, who was talking and illustrating something with his hands—and gave the new guests quite a mechanical greeting. Mrs. Hardman, however, welcomed

them with a fat and rubicund stateliness, as though she was some queen receiving. Mr. Talbot looked round the room to take a hasty view of the people who were assembled, and most of whom he knew. For the Honourable Mrs. Talbot there was, after the usual formula, a seat dug out, as it were, on the sofa, between other matrons, and the lovely Phœbe had sunk down on an ottoman, spreading out in vast billows of virgin silk, quite close to a tall, soldierly man, with grey moustaches.

The potentate upon the rug—and at every dinner there is a king—was a wiry, compact, high-shouldered gentleman, with a very tight, smooth face, a white tie without any creases, and that seemed to fasten behind a velvet collar and a wig. "And the most curious part of the whole," he was saying, "was that

the bishop never saw him again—never heard of him even!" And he turned and swayed on his heel from one side to the other, looking into every face. "Strange, wasn't it? Brindley told me that story himself." Chorus,—"Most singular!" "Oddest thing!" "So strange!" was murmured all round. Mr. Talbot knew that this was Lord Northfleet. "Ever hear how Brindley himself got Gravesend?" he went on, sharply. "A mere accident. Same name, you know, as the engineer—connected, of course, with the canal, and the Ellesmeres. The Premier once sat for the borough," &c. All this while Mr. Hardman was listening in the statesman attitude, his chin now high, now depressed, as he looked at his glazed feet, the lord clattering on with the most "curious" stories. With reluctance the host had to address himself to the almost

menial duty of assorting his guests, and in a haughty way bade each man take down each woman. A good-looking youth, with small, glossy moustache, and not more than eighteen, was led pompously to our Livy for her dinner companion, introduced as "My son," and it was just at that moment that Mrs. Talbot rose up with rustles and many smiles to greet the daughter of the house.

Any man of the world seeing the two ladies meet, would have read off the whole story with much amusement and interest, just as an experienced doctor would guess at the history of a whole case. The manufacturer's daughter came forward with a placid wariness, much as a man of business comes out from his office to see some importuning visitor who, he suspects, wants something. There was a calm coldness—combativeness in

ambuscade—a defence at all points, with a prospect of security. This gave to Mrs. Talbot's simpering courtesies an air of trepidation almost. The two ladies disliked each other; one, besides, despising, and the other fearing, that dull lump of coarse metal, her father, who, from constant grovelling before the molten calf, had grown into the image of one himself; and his coarse instinct was utterly insensible to any such fine-spun, and delicate currents of emotion about him. About Miss Hardman there was something remarkable. She carried herself well; she was really one of the company of "fine girls," as they are called, who, twenty years hence, turn out vast and portly women.

Every one wondered how Rosa Hardman had contrived to drive out of herself all trace of those two vulgar parents of

hers; but she had for the present, certainly; unless physical enemies,—skin, flesh, &c.,—should prove too much for her by-and-by. She had fine hair, and good eyes, which seemed her own very mind, for when she fixed them she gave the idea of search, and of question, and of deliberation, and of final decision. They seemed to say, "Ah, now! I see through your designs!" This thoughtful gaze no one much relished, still less her parents, who disliked their daughter, and had an uneasy feeling that she took the measure of their inferiority. Even such an uneasy feeling was in Mrs. Talbot's mind, as she retired to her sofa again. And when it had got abroad in the room, by a sort of gentle masonry, that the time had come, and every one was rustling about and seeking his own, in a sort of agitation, Mrs. Talbot, glancing in the

direction of her sister Phœbe, followed that maiden's look of consternation, and saw Colonel Labouchere and Miss Hardman passing down, joined together and not to be sundered for that evening.

At that moment the woman of the world seemed to read, as by an inspiration, a whole chronicle of what had taken place when she was not present—chapters upon chapters in the book of intrigue. To the deserted Phœbe came one of the supernumeraries of the party, called up from the rear,—a mere raw soldier, and Mrs. Talbot noted with pain her look of bewildered astonishment. For there is a sort of honourable understanding in these matters—a kind of delicate forbearance as to the matter of proprietorship. It was understood through the whole parish what designs the Talbot family entertained upon the stranger.

That dinner was like one of the banquets on an opera stage—the gold and the silver and finery were daubed on over the room, the table, and the picture-frames, much as the owner was inclined to embroider heavily his canary liveries. There was a vast deal of what seemed gold plate, huge silver urns, in the worst taste, under which the table groaned. It was, as some one said, like the prize table we see in a tent at a shooting match. The host and his lady sat well back, and scarcely spoke, but surveyed their own magnificence, like the theatrical kings and queens who preside at the banquets just alluded to. On the wall hung another host and hostess, with full as much gaudy paint heaped on as could be given for the money—he, with his hand under his waistcoat collar, his head back, his lips and chin drawn up, in the favourite expression,

"I am listening to your statement, sir; and am prepared with a reply to your worthless argument:" she in a rich flame-coloured silk, diamonds, and lace, full length; the red, full face, toned down into a lovely and "heightened" bloom,—indeed, one of the grossest pieces of pictorial subservience Bicknell, the artist, had yet been guilty of. It had been refused admittance to the walls of the Academy; "*owing to its size!*" Bicknell told the rich man, but told his friends quite another story. He would have been ashamed to have such a bit of millinery hung up with his name to it; but had made the "two vulgarians" pay fifty per cent. more for his putting in the dress at all.

Mrs. Talbot was seated opposite the daughter of the house, and before dinner was half over, had read full a volume and

a half of *that* story. It was a game, indeed, she had often played herself, and found a great piquancy in it. Just as our gallant sailors love what is called a "cutting out" expedition; and while they are preparing the blockade and bombardment of some great port or fort, they man the pinnace and keep up the spirits of the men by a bold capture of some little sloop or merchantman, under the very noses of the guns. There is not much profit on the whole—if successful, the prize is worthless; but it is a dashing achievement, and *annoys the enemy.* So, it seemed to her, had been the motive of the large, steadily gazing Rose Hardman, and who, when she looked, seemed to look in reply, coldly, "Well? I am as much entitled as *you.* This was *your* old game. You think because my mother and father are vulgar, and have bad taste, that their family are

to be considered inferior, and that mind and ability go for nothing?"

The unhappy Phœbe also had an uneasy feeling that this was a new enemy who had appeared on the scene, and who was a highly dangerous one. She had not been trained in the mere arts of *that* warfare, had no strategy, and knew not how to change her front, fall back, form square, or even advance. She required cavalry, that useful "arm" in the person of her sister, to charge and clear the ground for her. And thus the young supernumerary who had her in his keeping knew not what to make of her *distrait* and worried air, and the young gentleman returning home that night told his friends that he had been sent down with "a heavy lump of a girl that hadn't two words to say for herself."

Lord Northfleet was "in great vein"

that evening. His "curious" stories and odd observations charmed every one. His thoughts or investigations ran in the strangest gullies and courses.

"Did you ever hear," he was heard to ask, with a loud mysteriousness, "that Byron *left two sons?* I had it from the old dean near Newstead; so like him, too; one of them with a tendency to club-foot. Wasn't it strange? *He* said they went to America." Or about the late Duke of Wellington, "which was told me by the present Lord Huntinbrough, not long before the time of the battle of Waterloo. When he was in London, he received a mysterious letter, asking him to give the writer a meeting in one of those back slums behind Soho. He was enjoined secrecy, and bidden to come alone, and the writer said if he had courage she would show him, for it was a woman's hand, a paper con-

taining the plans of one who was his greatest enemy. Huntinbrough, who was going on his staff at the time, came in, and it was shown to him, and he said something about the waste-paper basket, as a matter of course, but the Duke said, in his quiet way, 'I mean to go.' Huntinbrough knew it was useless to remonstrate, but he said he was never in such a mortal terror, for it had all the air of what they call a regular plant."

Lord Northfleet had a clear gritty voice, and worked his sharp head briskly as he told a story, addressing a scrap to this one, another to that, no matter how far off, until he gradually drew in an audience. Everyone was now listening. Mr. Hardman very proud.

"The Duke rode down to Soho; got down, threw the reins to a *gamin*, who was standing about, and went in to one

of the most cut-throat places you could conceive. He came home very grave and serious. It is supposed, and Hutinbrough had reason to know," the lord added, dropping his voice, and a salt spoon might have been heard to drop as he spoke, "that she was a former—you know—of the Emperor's. I believe what he heard there had something to do with the gaining of the battle!"

The host looked up and down the table, and it seemed as though his chin were about to retire for ever within his white tie, and be never seen again. His air was as who should say pompously to the guests, "See, what I have provided for you, a real lord, telling such curious stories, not the common sort of article, stories out of the newspapers, and all that, but real rare things you won't meet every day." The servants, in obedience to a haughty

sign, refrained from movement or clatter; the magic sounds, "Duke of Wellington," "Lord Huntinbrough," had the influence of a charm. Mr. Hardman spoke later of the great "tact" of Bewley, his butler, who had come to him from Lord Trueman, at Trueman's Court. The coachman, too, who had come from the Duke, was also seen hovering about, disdainfully making himself inefficient, haughtily standing afar off, listening with refined enjoyment, in what was a stiff robe that flowed about his limbs.

Beauty Talbot had fallen, as it were, upon clover pastures. A young girl, fresh, *naïve*, countrified, such as French novelists rave of as *délicieuse* and of a *fraicheur ravissant*. This little sapling was enchanted with the good-looking and agreeable gentleman who took her down, listening with a shy smile and scarcely contained

enjoyment to all that he told her, *of himself.* Not for long had he such a listener; for on average occasions he was given a trained married lady, who knew and was pretty tired of all the tricks of the little human comedy, and would have made the little girl "of the delicious *fraicheur*" stare by her criticism of "that vapid creature Talbot." He was quite happy, and told her all about himself, and his ways and likings. To him, indeed, a new object was almost essential, and to whom everything he could say was fresh. With those who knew him, or had met him often, he found "he wanted spring," and soon collapsed into dulness. He would return home quite in spirits, and his lady there would listen with interest to his recital of his great success. It kept him in spirits for a day; and, as she took care he should not meet the object that had so gratified

him again, the whole presently passed out of his mind.

Thus the dinner went on, vastly enjoyed by the supernumeraries and by the grand host, who looked down on his own pride and pomp, spoke very little, save an allusion to Lord Kelldrum, or to "the duke" from whom he got his coachman; and this card he had learned to play with what might be called "a clumsy adroitness." Thus. Lord Northfleet is telling a most singular thing about Madox, the expert. "Had noticed on a receipt the curious fact, writer bent his r's backwards. A year afterwards called at a trial—paper put into his hand, and remembered r's bent back. It was ten years before. Man hanged on the strength of this evidence."

Mr. Hardman (seeing the opportunity), "The best handwriting I ever saw in my life is that of the Duke's, so fine, clear,

bold, and distinct for a man of his age. You know him, of course, Lord Northfleet?"

Mrs. Talbot, sitting beside this golden calf, could not but glance with a smile of significance and amusement at a neighbour of hers, a gentleman of great intelligence and quietness. But the next moment she felt a gaze steadily fall upon her with a cold challenge and defiance, as much as to say, "I am on the alert. Well, what discovery have you made? It is surely not polite—certainly at *our* table—to sneer at your host." The next moment Mrs. Talbot saw those eyes turned to their neighbour, Colonel Labouchere, and from him to Beauty Talbot, and from the last to Mrs. Talbot, from whom both the Colonel and Miss Hardman, surprised as it were in an unlawful glance, turned away. From the common language of

women who are hostile to each other, Mrs. Talbot knew perfectly that the disparity between the ages of herself and her husband—her rock ahead, the "heel" of hers that was vulnerable—had been the subject of that whisper. That was indeed a most fatal and certain sign of the defection of the Colonel. For the sake of the new love, a man will ungratefully sacrifice on the spot, to gain the merest point, the most cherished allies, very much to their astonishment. Phœbe, also, afar off, saw that all seemed well-nigh lost.

Now, however, the ladies are moving up-stairs to assemble in their private sanhedrim. There it may be suspected it is as difficult for a woman to "hold her own" and take "position," as for a man to hold his own in the House of Commons. The "great lady" of the meeting has a strange power, which an inferior of the

same sex dare not do battle against, after the republican fashion in which an inferior male can stand up against a leading man in a society. With them there is more equality, and the lower being can assert himself even roughly, while the man of rank or genius is content, and too proud to struggle for superiority.

But the haughty and insipid lady, superior in *ton*, rank, and languor (and these arms are hers)—who will not condescend to do battle, how shall the unwieldy, flaming vulgarian contrive to approach her? That manner wins respect and allies. Those sitting round are drawn by it to support the chieftainess. This high office Mrs. Talbot took up at once when she reached the drawing-room, and the obsequious hostess rolled, as it were, to her feet. The great lady might be thinking of something else: she had not forgotten her old

days, when she had to fight her way through the crowd before she had attained the honours of the tabaret.

Thus enthroned, a queen of light,—the rustic ladies of the district grouped about her, a few light girls talking eagerly together at a distance, yet stealing sly and reverential glances—Mrs. Talbot "presided," and gave her little senate laws in a low, sweet murmur of gentility, which she had no reason to pitch in a higher key—a softly melodious monologue—which by the art of her training had no air of selfish monopoly or vulgar personality. The great idol in human flesh, that seemed incompressible, almost determined to escape from the frail tracery of tulle and silks, Mrs. Hardman sat near her, on rolling billows of cushion, a huge swollen wave. She was content to listen and distend her lips in rich smiles of admiration.

It was only when Mrs. Talbot's eye rested on the daughter of the house, who sat near her, as though under a compulsion of respect, that she grew a little uneasy. That cold look, seemed to say, "all this loftiness does well enough among the people who are listening to you, but not for me, on whom you impose about as much as the fine clothes of an actor upon an old playgoer." The retired soldier "itched" for battle, yet at the same time dreaded it. Something, however, drew her on.

Mrs. Talbot could not be rude, or ill-bred to honest vulgarity; Mrs. Hardman was so grotesquely "common," that she could only smile at her. It would have been simply cruel to have been insolent to her; but there was such a challenge in the eyes of the girl opposite that she could not resist sacrificing

her good breeding and delicacy. The hostess spoke of some of the rich properties of the house—the paper splashed and daubed with gold bunches of flowers, and fenced in with great bars of superfluous moulding. The decorators and finishers had also hoisted up vast beams, or booms, of gold—perhaps with cranes—from which hung enormous mainsails of the richest figured silk known to the market, and which would take a whole crew to "draw" or furl. The same artists had filled the room with huge buhl structures. Mrs. Hardman told how "she had left it all to Towerson and Jones."

"Left it all to them?" repeated Mrs. Talbot, with a smile; "ah, *that* explains it!"

It is curious what a retribution there is in these things; and how, where there is no restraint, punishment is sure to fol-

low. Mrs. Talbot little dreamed what trouble this unlucky vendetta into which she was rushing was storing up for her. On this hint, which always gave her an eternal fluency, Mrs. Hardman began to pour out details: how Towerson himself had come down and stayed a week, superintending; and how, in short, "they had left it all to him." The drawing-room was done exactly "the same as the duke's"—the nobleman who had supplied the famous coachman. Though, indeed, had the latter been called up to give his testimony as to the exact reproduction of the ducal drawing-room, he would have contemptuously dismissed any sense of likeness, with a declaration, "it were no more like than a bay 'orse is to a grey."

"Like the duke's!" said Mrs. Talbot, not to Mrs. Hardman, but to Miss Hard-

man. "Oh! then that is conclusive as to its taste."

"You, of course, mean its bad taste," said Rosa, coldly. "I understand you; for you could not mean to say that a nobleman is guaranteed against bad taste, *because* he is a nobleman."

Mrs. Talbot coloured, drew her lace shawl up, and rattled her ornaments. She shook her head helplessly.

"I merely use the common English language," she said, "and ordinary words. My poor head cannot follow all these refinements."

"There *is* too much ornament," went on the girl; "far too much heavy gold and gaudiness; yet we know that large rooms of this sort require this heavy style of decoration. We did not know much of the style usual in the noble houses, so we could only follow precedent and what

was told to us. Hence we fell into the mistake of adopting the duke's model. We only deserve pity, but you must not condemn."

"Pity!" repeated her mother wondering, yet with an instinct that Rosa was at some of her usual absurd philosophy. "Ah, child, what folly you talk! Who wants to pity, or to condemn?"

"Well, you *have* my pity, with all my heart," said Mrs. Talbot, with a pretty simper; "and as much of it as you can want." And the rustic ladies sitting round, though scarcely understanding, saw that there was "sparring" going on, and were delighted to show by obsequious smiles that the lady of rank and fashion hit far away the best.

Miss Hardman seemed to smile good-humouredly.

"But surely you are amusing yourself

with us when you say that the taste of a duke, or, I suppose you mean, of the aristocracy, is a safe guide, if the things be true that we hear. The fine ladies who take up rich but inferior people for payment——"

The curl on Mrs. Talbot's lip was as though she had seen a reptile crawling towards her.

"Payment! Where have you heard such stories? If indeed you consult the penny papers——"

"I mean," said Rosa, "those who take up, as it is called, the low, rich person, and in return for the opera-boxes, carriages, dinners, and perhaps houses, ask a few nice people—surely *that* is payment. Taste, indeed! What models to follow! There are fine ladies up in town, I have been told, who do not disdain to go to the parties of those they think beneath

them—to sit at their tables, use them for their own convenience, and then will sneer, and turn the foolish creatures into ridicule for their fine friends. There is worse taste in the world than overloading rooms with gilding and decoration!"

Mrs. Hardman rolled on her cushions in great trouble. She thought her daughter taking leave of her senses. The looks of Mrs. Talbot told her that that lady was being hurt—insulted—in some mysterious way, which she could not follow.

"For shame, Rosa!" she said. "What you say, Mrs. Talbot, is so right, and I am sure you know best about the duke, and we could not be wrong in following him."

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE DRAWING-ROOM.

Now the door opens undecidedly, as under undecided hands, yet such as would outpour blessings on all the world. "The gentlemen were coming up!" That blessing, too long denied, was to be restored. Below, their ears had been dinned by the coarse trumpeting of the gentleman who was entertaining them. It was "the duke's coachman," over and again, and in a most ingenious variety of shapes. Those fine grapes—the duke's coachman—*i.e.*, Sir J. Shortall has the same. Those silver branches, so tall and spreading in their foliage, that a small guest could repose

under it, and literally find shelter from the tropical glare of the Hardman gas——Duke's coachman again. "Alcock had supplied the identical fellow to it" to one of the royal princes. These dessert-plates, in the shape of scallop-shells, the duke's coachman explained *their* presence also; through some mysterious channel, the host had discovered that that "identical pattern" had been chosen as a wedding present for the beautiful and high-born Lady Amelia Winter. They would have found out for themselves, without the assistance of this eternal coachman, that it was tolerable claret which had been set before them, but for the wearying proclamation of their vapouring host—"Bulmer sent me that; I gave him his own terms. He divided the lot with the duke, his royal highness, and with me. Just our three

cellars. In six years, every glass will be worth a guinea."

"D—n his swagger," said one of the gentlemen, with rude hunting manners, very far down, to his neighbours. "This ain't an auction room. He don't want us to bid for his wine, does he?"

But some of the more rustic were vastly impressed, and, by an instinct, even disbelievers and judges began to sip, in a juryman-like way, and smack their lips, and shake their heads.

We have not yet arrived at that beginning of wisdom which shall make us indulge in our rare and delicate wines, not at the end of many courses, and of sauces and sweets, but at the beginning, with an unvitiated palate. His lordship does not much care, though he knows a good glass of wine. He has a story about the late Bishop of

——, "poor old Stinger—when some workmen broke into what proved to be an old cellar, stocked by his grandfather—perhaps the best connoisseur of his day. The son thought he had drank it all out, when they came on this find. The late General Dobbs went to dine with him,—scenting a good thing, you know,—and, to his disgust, found the common poor stuff set down before him. You know they were notorious at the palace for bad wine; even the curates could hardly be got to drink it, though they knew, poor devils, what depended on it."

"'But surely,' says Dobbs, literally making a face as he took the first glass, this can't be——'

"'Oh, that old stuff,' says Stinger, the old stager; 'it had no body in it. I got them to change with me at the hospital.'"

The "gentlemen" being now dispersed in skirmishing order about the room, the usual business of that season was going forward. The three or four elders or prophets — lean pantaloons, unslippered for the occasion—were clustered in the back drawing-room, their heads together, jerking like birds over a fountain, talking in pleasant confidence. For those old souls, so red of face, so inflamed in eye, this is one of the few pleasures left; and it is wonderful how, with all their other organs so palpably perishing, this last sense of relish remains with them. Such veterans we see dining out to the last, taking their wines and rich dishes where far younger men are cautious.

His lordship was still in a circle on the rug, whispering his little story, which seemed an extract from some old scan-

dalous memoir. "It was notorious the likeness of young Boothby to the old Dean of Cheltenham. Same eyes, same nose, eh? Well, there were reasons for that likeness. Dean was tutor, when a young man, at poor Lady Jane Boothby's, and an uncommon good-looking fellow then; and she must take lessons in Latin from the tutor. An old housekeeper saw what was going on; and he was quietly *chassé*. Never knew so sensible a fellow as the Dean."

The rest of the room was, indeed, an encampment. Mr. Hardman was very happy. His whole full-length came down from the frame; and, stalking about, he felt something like a minister who had thrown open his rooms, was receiving, and felt it his duty to go about from guest to guest, "to make every one feel at his ease," though no one seemed to

value, or sometimes even to notice, such attentions. He was proud of having as his guest such a distinguished woman as "the Honourable Mrs. Talbot," and was unusually gracious to an obscure stranger or two, as there was an opportunity of explaining to them who she was.

His eye, however, rested with some displeasure on his son, who was in an effusion of boyish adoration before the pretty daughter of Mrs. Talbot—a foolish and unprofitable proceeding, the lad only making himself "ridiculous with such follies." The Honourable Mrs. Talbot was one thing, but her daughter was quite another; and there were so many rich young fellows, with expectations, who presently *would* destroy their father's plans by rushing off and marrying mere paupers. For the scion of his house he had quite other designs; and he could

not even allow of any foolish waste of time in such matters. It was irreverence for the great purpose of life and his vocation. By and by, when he had cemented intimacies with many persons of rank, he intended making an arrangement—seated in his cabinet-minister attitude, behind his papers, despatch boxes, &c.—with some noble person for a daughter. This would conduce to *his* influence and position. It was an incident in the important career he saw fast opening before him. That picture of himself in black, his hand under his waistcoat—perpetually gliding about gilded and gorgeous drawing-rooms — an eternal host, as it were—was always before him. It was with a sort of arrogant rudeness that he called off his son.

"Here, sir! have you no duties in my house to do? Chattering folly in this

style! You'll never learn. Go, and attend to my guests, sir; you have no manners!"

And yet, had this son been forward in company in attending to the leading guests, his father would have rudely thrust him aside, telling him he was "infernal officious," and took too much on himself. "He'd have him know his place, and that he wasn't master of that house quite, yet." Such is the inconsistency of arrogance.

The gentle Phœbe had taken up a sort of advanced post near the door, so as to have a desperate chance of cutting off her warrior. The colonel was a gentleman, but quite an old campaigner in many senses. He had "hacked about" from garrison to garrison, and "knew girls and their tricks by heart." Had he really been originally taken by the attractive Phœbe,

and was now turned away from her, or had he been merely paying her those gracious civilities with which a selfish man must fill up his time and amuse himself on a desert island? Or had Phœbe, too sanguine, coloured up into gorgeous pictures what was merely indifferent? It is hard to tell. It is certain that the colonel was detained by that daring outpost only a few seconds (who was alert, bold, and hazardous in her advances), and then was seen to break away; "to escape," as he ill-naturedly would have said, and make for her with the large eyes. An experienced matrimonial physician, who conducted "cases" of that sort, if called in, would have pronounced, after a hopeless glance at the patient, that "all that" was nearly over, and that human skill could avail little or nothing. The patient, alas! would be

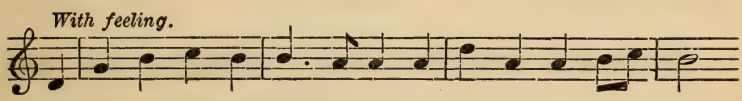
the last to see this, or to know her danger.

Now the Honourable Mrs. Talbot is called over to the piano. Everyone is round, pressing the Beauty to give one of his "little" songs; though why they were so styled, being of the same length and pretensions as others, it was difficult to say. The young "nursery" girl was the most eager, the author himself was the least disinclined; indeed the music was actually below in the hall, enwrapped somewhere in his coat, and he looked about for his wife and faithful accompanyist.

Immediately she had glided to the piano. There was all but a silence, save in the voice of Lord Northfleet, who was afar off on the rug of the next room, telling a clergyman, in low, confidential tones, with other admirers, a strange

story he heard from the late Bishop of the Leeward Isles. Looks of expostulation were turned towards him; but, in truth, his lordship looked on music much as he did on the noise of the tea cups and spoons which the footmen had been bringing round — a disagreeable accompaniment, but still not enough to interfere with conversation.

So the Beauty begins in a faint, delicate voice, but with an air as though he were a Mario, his head back, his soft eyes languishing towards the nursery young lady. He is very particular as to the accompaniment. It was called, "He gave one last and lingering smile." Words and music by A. Talbot, Esq, It ran something to this effect:—



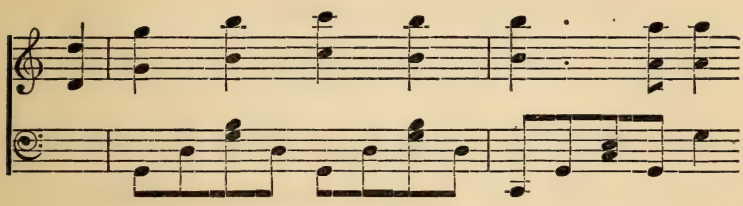
He stood be-side me at the door, His hand was hold - ing mine.

He stood beside me at the door,
  His hand was holding mine,
The waiting carriage o'er and o'er
  They'd called along the line.

Oh, lips so arched! oh, glossy hair!
  Ah, look that knows not guile!
I could not go—we could not part:
  He gave one lingering smile,
    One smile,
    One smile.
  One last and lingering smile.

This line he addressed point-blank to the lustre, as though he could not trust himself to look lower. Mrs. Talbot, always nervous in accompanying the Beauty's songs, had hurried a little too much at the end, and received a hoarse whispered reproof, which was perceived by all; and many, ignorant of music, felt that she was not quite up to the thing. It is surprising, indeed, how easily the good-natured player is sacrificed to the

selfishness of the one he serves; and the singer who has failed will be sure, by a look of reproach, to throw the whole blame on the innocent assistant. As the intermediate symphony moved on, there was a sharp recitative from the next room.



("The bishop said to him, 'My good man, I can do nothing for you, I really can't.' And who do you suppose this apparent beggar turned out to be?" &c.)

Every one was conventionally charmed at this melody and the words of the little incident, which seemed to be a picture drawn from the singer's own experience. Some of the men looked at each other privately, with a tendency to grimace, as who should say, "What fun this

Beauty was." But they were under the influence of the society, and dared not openly be contemptuous. Even as he finished, the unauthorised recitative fell on the last chord with a jar.

("I can tell you he never would open his lips to the bishop again.")

There was one certainly who might have played for him with more effect, but Livy would not have interfered with this pet and special department of her mother's. The young officer, the son of the house, was greatly attracted by her—as indeed who was not likely to be?—having devoted himself to her during the dinner, and told her all about himself—one of the fashions in which our poor human nature believes it is favourably impressing others. Yet, as has been mentioned, the wretched "Birmingham plating" of the father and mother was not overlying his soul, that

cold, showy, glittering, and worthless ware which his odious parents were flashing in everybody's eyes. How he escaped having such an ornament bound up in his system, cramping and tightening his feelings and sympathies, was a marvel. But he could talk, and talk with the pleasantness of a young fellow not yet spoiled or grown affected. Livy was amused and interested, and showed that she was interested. Nature has always this certain spell; but nature also, or perhaps the complacent personality of selfishness, makes the manly heart mistake such indulgence for something belonging to "Love's kingdom." He was quite delighted with himself, and in the mood for being rallied, quizzed, punched on the chest, or treated to any of those shapes of compliments with which men greet their brothers in such cases. He had

not seen much garrison service, but had encountered many a garrison girl—irregular horse of the drawing-room—those forward, loud ladies of industry, who are in their own ranks pretty much as are barmaids, and their manners, in a lower one. Miss Livy was to his eyes quite of another pattern. And indeed these creatures who come spurring up to men quite boldly in rooms, challenging them to this and that, have their use as foils to their perfect sisters.

But all were now about moving, when the Colonel showed signs that his cruel, stony heart had been softened, and came over to the lorn and lone Phœbe. He was all smiles and good-nature, and it must be said quite unconscious of his previous baseness.

"You have heard," he said, "what we are going to do? Our officers want to

give a series of Wednesday dances. You come, as a matter of course. I ask you, and won't send even a formal invitation."

The slightest signs of grace in these cases, makes the most outrageous past be forgotten. The downcast face beamed again with smiles and trust. Is it love that does this? love that forgives, trusts all, and hopes for all, or simply a sense of mistake, an acknowledgment that what had passed meant nothing; a decorous self-interest which is content to overlook all and begin again fairly, provided there is a sincere change of conduct? Into these niceties we need not pry; but the result was the hopeful Phœbe went down to the carriage with the old dreams before her eyes. There was the usual procession, Mr. Hardman leading, with Mrs. Talbot and his enraptured son still with her daughter. "Now you will

be sure to come to the dance. I count upon you, and I know you will enjoy it."

Mr. Hardman while sweeping across his own hall in this function always seemed to himself ducal rather, and almost ancestral. He was the lord of the house seeing "his guests" out. He was particular that all "his menials" should be mustered about that time, so as to impress the departing guests. It gave a baronial air. Phœbe, happiest of women, was waited on by the Colonel. True, the keener eye of Mrs. Talbot had noted that he was going away also, and that the lamps of his little "trap" were flashing in the open door; but we must not search too narrowly, or look these rare gift horses too jealously in the mouth. Double motives may, and do, accompany many an act in life; interest may go with inclination, in the most convenient way;

but the sensible person will accept the satisfactory result. She got into her carriage elated. But what goaded her really was the insolence, the air of command, the victory even "of that low woman," and who seemed to hint at something to be in the future. A sort of claim for dominion,—a low manufacturer's girl, about, as it were, "to contest the county" with her, the queen of the district.

In that girl's eyes there was a challenge, and a venomous one. The whole party, the low rich man, and airs of money and show, were simply contemptible, not in the least dangerous. Not indeed that she had much care about social pre-eminence now; but there was something in those steady eyes that meant even more. These were her thoughts as she found herself in her drawing-room,

taking off her gold and silver armour before the glass. Beauty Talbot looked up from his own personal reverie; and coming fresh from that gew-gaw house and coarse finery, may have been struck by the contrast; the air of refinement and breeding, in that well-shaped face and delicate arms, above all in the dress, which was a master-piece of design and execution. The first was her own, and the wealth of the Hardmans could not have got quite the same touches. Whether he thought this or no, he was looking at her, and the watchful Livy, full of delight, saw him and struck in, "*Doesn't* she look well, Beauty, after those people!"

With some little enthusiasm — it reflected praise on him, his property—the Beauty answered, "Really, yes, she is quite handsome to-night."

The lady looked round on both with

a smile, her elbow on the chimney-piece, her arm and wrist arched. So might Bicknell have painted her for the Academy. The delicate green of her dress, and the lace, would have worked up finely. The Beauty was in good humour, his humour always giving the tone to his little society.

The party in that small travelling chamber had travelled home very happily. Mrs. Talbot was a little silent. She had a *conviction* that for Phœbe the day *was* lost. There was all the trouble they had taken, the labour, the positive hard work, all spent for nothing.

CHAPTER VII.

"OLD DICK LUMLEY."

On the next day there was still a palpable gloom over the ladies' side of the household. There were councils and consultations. Of these Mr. Talbot was quite unobservant, being in good spirits and good humour. He was pleased with his performances of the night before. Mrs. Talbot had an air of trouble and dissatisfaction. Perhaps it was founded on the idea that in that house she must not seem to be defeated in anything, or by anyone. She was "thorough" in all things; a gallant creature that would do battle to the last with years, and the

mean little shabby attacks of old Time's toadies and jackals — namely, wrinkles, fading colour, loss of hair, teeth, &c.— fight them inch by inch, repairing the damage until, as the good-natured "Old Dick Lumley" said, who often dined with them, "She would all crumble and collapse one fine morning, like the one-horse shay." To be defeated in that little corner of their county, and by a "low" girl, meant a defeat in her own house, in her own rooms. She knew how slight was the allegiance of her own troops, of that domestic force which she had to try and turn out, and keep from insubordination. At any moment there might have been a revolt, which only endless watchfulness could prevent. He, too, though not much interested in so slight an affair, and one that did not concern him, had been led to believe in

certain victory, and would be sure to harp on the defeat as something that showed him wiser than anyone else.

That day, also, was to be a day of new disaster and discouragement, for about noon arrived a letter from Colonel Labouchere, with many regrets that he could not present himself at lunch on some particular day, "as he had forgotten that he had engaged himself at The Towers." When this news came, Phœbe flung the letter down passionately, as though the game were up, and with tears in her eyes said she would go away that very evening. Mrs. Talbot was biting her lips, and her foot was patting on the carpet.

"I have a trifle more spirit than that," she said. "She shall come to your feet, Phœbe, and beg your pardon yet."

"She!" repeated the other, in amazement. "Who do you mean?"

Mrs. Talbot was not thinking of the lover, nor of the gentleman they wished to make into a lover.

"That low girl—that fellow's daughter. Can't you see it is against *me* she means all this? She wants to raise that family of hers by their money; she wants to make them the first people in this part of the county. But she shall not depose me, if I die for it."

Here entered Livy, and just caught these last words.

"Depose you, dearest; you who look so magnificent and so like your picture this morning?" And she smoothed her mother's golden hair softly, and kissed her on the forehead, as if she were a younger and petted sister. The picture was of the now exploded Chalon pattern—

faint, delicate water colouring—celestial, diaphanous floating in the air, as the chief artists of that school loved to present their heroines.

This, indeed—done in the full heyday of her charms, when she was "in the service," and, a colonel-like belle—was always the standard of comparison used by this faithful soldier. It was amazing, indeed, considering the interval of years, how little difference there was between the two. In fact, the picture had not lasted nearly so well. It was her mirror, and she consulted it as often as the one on her dressing-table. Pale, faint, pink, delicate watery blue, jewels, laces, floating away in the breeze—it can now be seen engraved in an old Book of Beauty.

Towards five o'clock Mr. Talbot came forth, and said he would stroll down and meet "Old Dick Lumley," who was com-

ing out by the train about that time. He took his daughter with him, as a matter of convenience, just as he would have taken down his hat or his umbrella. He fell into this, not from any profound affection, paternal or otherwise, but from simple habit. He could not endure walking alone, and she, affectionately artful, contrived to be as adroitly flattering in her innocent adulation of his looks and gifts as some old courtier, and had at least the merit of putting him in good humour.

On the road, when they got to the top of the hill, they saw a small figure in a light grey shooting-coat and garden-hat trotting briskly towards them. Any one might have said, "Here is some officer from the garrison—some young active fellow." Afar off he took off his hat, and waved it cheerily like a Jack Tar, then

broke into a jerky run. This was "Old Dick Lumley" coming up, whom every one about town knew well, and whom people could take any number of affidavits, and prove by documents, to be at least seventy-six years old, and yet as young as any boy in the country.

"Old Dick Lumley" was in the same office (Board of Green Cloth at Buckingham Palace) with Mr. Talbot. He had originally filled the strange office of "Gentleman at Large" at Dublin Castle, where there are as many curious little court berths as at some German Pumpernickel, had hung on under various viceroys, and had at last been "discharged with all wages paid him," as a malicious snarler of the place said. This sort of pleasant grasshopper is quite a species; it chirrups with delight about the daisies and buttercups which have "handles to their names."

Sometimes they allowed him to nibble at their leaves, and one obtained him this "little berth," which came in very satisfactorily. He had been in the service of Rank, "from his childhood, man and boy," for years. In that dear campaigning he had accepted halfpence, kicks, rebuffs, snubs, actual privations; yet still would not have exchanged the life for *plebeian* ease and luxury. It was the only air that suited his old lungs.

To "Dublin Castle" had been always coming a stream of visitors, more or less aristocratic, and these the "Gentlemen at large" duly breathed, inhaled, felt, and patted all over. He adhered to them like mussels. He would have been glad to do menial offices for them, would they have permitted him. He never let them "go" afterwards, waited on them in town, trained himself to be amusing, prattling,

and useful, and at last got recognised—the *grand point.* To be recognised was to be found at *other* houses; an argument to you for having him at *yours.* About society flutter many of these little insects, *chiffoniers* of gossip, who are repaid for their really useful labours by admission to the more select shows. Ten minutes with a baronet is a lunch; five with a lord, a good dinner.

But there was another side to "Old Dick Lumley's" character, more human, for which we may have some sympathy. Like Mrs. Talbot, he was doing battle with Time, decay, weakness, and had fought even more successfully than she had done. No one ever knew him to be ill; he never allowed himself to be ill. It might be suspected that he withdrew to some lone garret, where no one could see him. There was no stooping, no decay, no ne-

glect; yet his age was undoubted. His dress was more surprising still,—like that of a man of five-and-twenty, and even more gay. As Mr. Talbot and his daughter came down the hill, they saw him glittering in his bright blue tie and still brighter face. In his voice there was a metallic ring, not the wheeze of old age, and in his eye a roguish twinkle.

"Here I am! come down to you, and made out a day at last. Ah, Miss Livy, I wish you had been at Lady Mantowers' last night. They wanted beauty, I can tell you—a set of ogresses. Well, Talbot, I am so glad to meet you."

On this, "Old Dick Lumley" launched out into an account of his doings, just as a political man might unfold quite a budget of important news. He walked so fast and briskly, they could hardly keep up with him, while his voice left them

a long way behind. Livy delighted in listening to him—she thought so at least; but the reason more likely was, that she saw he was so welcome to both her father and mother. A visit from him introduced new vitality into the house, and kept *him* in pleasant acceptance of the existing order of things.

In the little round library—cosiest of regions, and which became infinitely more so during the dark hour before dinner—they found the ladies sitting at the fire, arrayed in what might be called the elegant regimental undress kept for that hour of the day. The iron grey of the evening was seen outside, through the windows, with the twinkle of the lamps from the passing coach or cart; while a shaded lamp in the corner spread a quiet half-light over the colours and properties in the room. Presently Old Dick Lumley

was in a little low chair—not by any means an "arm" one, which he left to the "old" men—sitting at the feet of the ladies, "amusing them so much." He unpacked all his little boxes and bundles rapidly, telling them of this country house and of that, where he had put up, as at a series of inns, and where he "picked up" people: with stories of "nice Lady Grace," and "dear Lady Mary," which are in a certain degree welcome, and which elevate our humanity and complacency, provided there be no object of self-glorification on the side of the relator. With such aid the time slipped by pleasantly, until dinner came.

These little entertainments "Beauty" Talbot knew how to do very well—so his friends said. Rather he himself could talk about what had been arranged, with quite an air of authorship. Yet it was

the skilful forethought of his daughter—even her more skilful touch—that contrived the whole. She could even believe—though a partial filial delusion—that he had contrived the whole. Everything was small, hot, choice; everything came up swiftly, by "a lift;" and a neat-handed Phyllis waited. No ancient stomach appreciated these rare qualities so sincerely and gratefully as that of Old Dick Lumley. It oiled the very wheels of his elocution.

"Now this *is* wonderfully good. The last time I had such a *vol au vent* as this was at Linderston, where, I assure you, we all suspected that Lady Linder's own fair fingers had—now, don't smile, Miss Livy—had held the fork, or whatever it was. It is now coming up a good deal among our fine ladies, is cookery. You know Lady Emily St. Luke's little book—

the prettiest thing in the world—she gave me a copy herself—"Toothsome Things"—not bad as a title! We had a regular consultation over it, your humble servant in the chair, and they did me the honour to approve of mine. 'If you were but one of the dishes, Lady Emily!' I said. That carried it."

This was a specimen of Dick Lumley's "powers," as he would have called it—his style, as it were. As in Lady Emily's cookery, the chief elements were the seasonings, condiments, essences, garnishings—not the vulgar meats and poultry—so the chief strength of his talk lay in the garnishing of good names which he sprinkled thickly over it. He was going to Brierly next week, where there were to be theatricals; and, "only think," they had got the duke to take a part! Lady Whitman could make him do anything.

The week after, there were to be great doings at Greenhunt—the son, you know, coming of age. Next month there was Lady Susan's marriage with Longacre, of the Guards. Lucky dog!

So he proceeded with this fashionable diary, which he would be delighted to keep pencilling it day after day, as if he was just starting in life, until one morning or night, a skinny, strong, hand was to be put over his shoulder, and snatch it from him.

He asked about their life down there.

"I heard there was a manufacturing man set up here. Just like 'em, daubing on the splash and colour, and all that; as Dudley said, the other day, very happily, too, they'd paint and varnish their houses in panels, like Lord Mayors' carriages, with arms and gold, if they could. Dreadful people, my dear Miss

Livy. They've such a coarse touch, you see. Their money is positively worth to them about one-fourth of what it is to us decently-born people. They don't know how to use it, and," added Old Dick Lumley, dropping his voice mysteriously, as if he was about to announce a secret of the cabala, "you'll mark that in the way *they give to the servants*, you know. I give you my honour, Baker, Lord Greenman's valet—a house absolutely like an hotel all the year round—told me he'd sooner have a gentleman's shilling than your Manchester person's guinea."

Mrs. Talbot listened with pleasure.

"For anything I have seen of them, they are terrible. I really can't understand them. You may pity us here."

"Not a bit," said Mr. Lumley, heartily. "It will be a little excitement. You can snub 'em and snub 'em again:

all before the neighbours, too, which gives a whet. *That's* true luxury, as Lady Towler used to say. They *will* go blundering on, daubing their plate and money about in their disgusting way. Now, I'll tell you what occurred a year and a half ago, at Strachey's, over in the wilds of Ireland, where Lady Emma Strachey had asked *rather* a mixture, between ourselves; but we all knew what it was for—to get Strachey *in*. All the parsons, you know, and that sort of thing. Heavy as dumplings! Ah! ah! Miss Livy. *What* a Macedonian! If there be a thing I adore—but there's an artistic touch about *this*—and I must have some of that old East India with it."

This was one of the secrets of Old Dick Lumley's vitality—he always eat the best and choicest things that were served, taking care to dine at what he

called *guaranteed* houses, where there were notorious cellars, cooks, &c. Once give Dick Lumley a bad dinner and his active tongue gave the author a bad name for ever. He seemed to think that thus had been shortened his fag end of a life, by some days or hours.

"Well now, to come back to our *foie gras*—for old Lord Hartop used to say, they might have chosen a real delicacy when they went about it, and not vulgar sheep. Well, I want to tell you about my adventure at Strachey. It will amuse you all." And Old Dick Lumley smiled and smacked his lips, and showed white and even teeth, and took all the party in at a glance, to see that he had their attention—a regular prologue and manœuvre of his before beginning a choice story.

"A very good house, I assure you,"

he went on, apologising for Ireland; "things very well done, you know—groom of the chamber, and all that. She was a Greenman: took a fancy to Strachey, and quite formed him. Well, there was a sort of manufacturing girl, who came over with some one—just in the way that class of girl is brought to keep things lively. Webster says it's a regular profession, and a host who has to fill his house two or three times in the year, is very glad to hear of these supernumeraries, who know the business, and go to anyone and for anything. Ah, Miss Talbot, that astonishes you. Well, Strachey did the thing uncommonly well—good style, and all that; but that was Lady Emma, you know, who really had tact, and knew how to mix her company, and bring the right people together."

(Mr. Lumley spoke as if some delicious beverage was being compounded before him.)

"There were a good many of the Irishry—Lord Mountattic; Sir Hercules Jackson; a man who called himself, God knows why, The O'Daly; Lord and Lady Boreena; more Irish; and St. Maurice; with a few of us English, you know, to keep the mass sweet. Ha! ha!"

Like some of his countrymen, old Lumley was fond of speaking in a contemptuous way of this class of his fellow subjects.

"We had very fair shooting," he went on; "and good horses, and I had really some very pleasant drives about with Lady Boreena, who, by the way, asked me to go and see them at Boreen whenever it suited me. I declare I never thought of it until this moment! The

first slack time, I have I must put in at Boreen. Ha! ha!"

Olivia was more interested in the dramatic part of the story; saw that her mother was, and brought him back to the subject. Sometimes "the old man part" would overpower him; and people said that "Old Dick Lumley" took a fit of rambling.

"Well, the manufacturing young lady, Mr. Lumley?" she said.

"Oh, yes. I had my eye on her the whole time; and I assure you it was worth it; a kind of demure creature, but with an air of business. There was a genuine Irish barrister there—a rough, forward, amusing fellow—who fell head and ears in love with her. I believe she had a fancy for him, too; he had met her somewhere before, at some other house, and had actually got himself invited here.

"Well, they were giving a ball, and some officers came out for it with their colonel, a man whose face and name I remember perfectly. Fotheringham the name, and he had a very striking face, the sort ladies admire, you know; eh, Miss Livy! —a bold eye, meaning conquest,—and a steady stare, and a good complexion."

Livy, who, with quick instinct, saw her father's look, replied,—

"Not *our* style, Mr. Lumley. Those sort of faces are odious, and neither handsome nor likeable."

"No," said the Beauty, pettishly; "that's the regular healthy ploughman sort of thing. Any country bumpkin, I am sure, could get *that* up."

Sometimes, but not often, Old Dick Lumley thus "put his foot in it."

"Well, you, the ladies, are the best judges of that. What can we know

about it, except exhibit our phyzes in competition? Let the best be taken. Can I say more? But I am too long over this story of mine; and so I come to the last day, when I was going away.

"The barrister man had told me, with a foolish confidence, that he had all but got her consent, and was in the greatest jubilation; but you know I am sharp enough in my way, and I had seen something else going on, as it seemed to me, between my gallant colonel and the girl. As I said, I could not recal the story about him, or stories; but the ladies, I am bound to say, respected him highly. And why, ma'am? Some one had given out that he had been distinguished as a love-maker and heart-breaker, Miss Livy; and, 'pon my word, I don't know whether I ought to mention such a thing in this circle, but the rumour was, he

had taken to running off—with married ladies. And I assure you it amused me to see the curiosity and horrified interest there was about him among the ladies."

Beauty Talbot simpered and arranged his collar, as if *he* could quite understand that trait of human character.

Mr. Lumley himself noticed something like awakened attention even in the two ladies who were listening to him, and thus supported his unflattering description of a corner of our human nature.

Mrs. Talbot said,—

"I could see no attraction in such a man, and would shut my *doors* against him, as if he were a wild beast."

"Ah, yes; but we were in Ireland, where love, war, and hunting, they told me, was everything. But now I am really coming to the point. I pass over a good deal of what I saw, and what I

guessed was going on; but on one grey evening, my Lady Boreena asked me would I take a drive with her and her niece, in a private outside car that Strachey had? I was delighted to take charge of them, and we had a pleasant drive that really was most agreeable.—(I wish these things were more introduced with us.)—We were talking a good deal over the colonel and his doings, and I assure *you* my lady did not take precisely your view of that officer. But as we talked, I suddenly, by a sort of Providence, recollected all about him. He was Gore *v.* Gore and another, do you know. You see that makes all the difference; it being quite a serious thing then, as Lady Boreena said. I remember perfectly, no divorce could be got.

"We were turning back, afraid of being late for dinner, and putting the horse to

it, for we had a good seven miles to go, when we came close to the station: and at that moment a common outside car passed us, with two people on it. Now it was not very dark—only grey, you know; but I assure you I have the best eyes in the world, and I said, aloud,—

"'My God! why that's the Colonel and that——, the manufacturer-girl.'

"I forget her name; but so Lady Boreena always called her. She said to me,—

"'Oh, impossible!'

"'There could be no mistake,' I said; and these were my very words—'and it really has the look as if they were trying to catch the train.'

"I had stopped the car; the same idea was in both our minds.

"I think, Lady Boreena,' I said, it is almost a duty that we should see a little

more of this, as guests of our friend Strachey.'

"And so we turned back, I declare we did; and went towards the station.

"Now I really like getting on a track of this sort, for, you see, it makes an adventure. Things are generally a little tame, you see.

"So I got down, went into the station, and there what do you think I saw—or who do you think I saw standing on the platform? Why, my young lady. She started, but then looked at me wildly.

"'Not going away?' I said; 'and with that colonel? Most singular!' I said.

"'Why should you assume that?' she said, coldly.

"'Because it looks so strange,' I answered; 'the tableaux coming off to-night you were to take a part in, and—'

"'I am leaving that house,' she said,

'where I have been insulted, putting up with long insult from you all. I have met genteel people who have been kind to me.'

"'To be sure,' I said. 'But really you ought to reflect, our excellent friend, Strachey, and Lady Emma, such a *thing* taking place *from* their house, and all the talking, and your friend a *married man*—'

"She gave a cry. 'Married! no.' At that moment he came up, and heard the word. 'Now, what do *you* want?' he said, in a very rude way, I must confess. But he was a bad style of fellow.

"'Is this true?' she asked, turning to him.

"'My good sir, you can't. We about town know of "Gore and Gore." It's absurd. At this corner of Ireland, of course, it was very natural it should not have transpired.'

"'You have deceived me, then,' she

said, it is true; I see. But O! what was I near doing?'

"'Nothing,' I said. 'I have been taking a drive with Lady Boreena; why should you not have joined *us*, and why may we not have picked up the Colonel on the road, or better still, why could not he have gone away on duty or sick leave?'

"On that he broke out in very abusive language. But I always heard he was a low fellow, a man not to know exactly. So I took no notice. We took our gay lady up on the car, and jogged home most comfortably, talking of the weather. And, would you believe it? she was the coolest, best trained creature I ever met, and not in the least grateful to me; actually challenged us to tell it out if we dared—what if she *had* driven on a car with an officer? other young ladies had ridden out with gentlemen—that no one would believe it;

and actually appeared this very night in the charades, and brazened it out before the company. I never told anyone then or there—behaved with unnecessary honour. So did Lady Boreena; and she may thank me if she's respectably married to one of her own class, which no doubt she has schemed out by this time. For she was decidedly clever. Now there's a story you wouldn't meet in a novel!" The ladies were rising to go.

"A most curious history," said Mrs. Talbot, "and very dramatically told. But you never mentioned the name."

"Oh, come, that would not be fair, you know; honour."

Mr. Lumley was standing up, and holding the door open. Many gentlemen make this effort with an air as if it was the highest act of gallantry known.

"Oh, you must, really," said Mrs.

Talbot decidedly, and stopping short in the doorway.

Mr. Lumley looked at her from head to foot in deep admiration. Olivia was gazing fondly at her mother, and thinking how handsome in figure and brilliancy *she* was. The light played on her fine hair, complexion, and the graceful arch of her neck. Even Mr. Lumley wondered at the "preservation."

"Well," he said, shaking his head, good-humouredly, "someway the name *has* slipped out of my memory. I know so many people just merely met in that fashion. But it will come back to me."

"I shall expect you to tell me," she said, turning away.

Then the two gentlemen sat down, and "drew in" the chairs close to the fire, and Old Dick Lumley unpacked a little private and scandalous wallet of stories,

such as these old fellows carry about with them, and from the choiceness and rarity of what they offer, keep up their credit with the men, and old ladies not too nice. These related to conquests and "awkwardnesses," and what is described in a newspaper as, "a most painful occurrence in a family of distinction." In the middle of which Mr. Lumley suddenly called out, "Ah! I have the name! I knew it would come back. I never lose anything altogether. Well! Suppose we go upstairs."

Beauty Talbot felt that they were on a subject in which he was an expert, and would have liked to add some old experiences of his own, before he had gone into paddock, as it were, and of more innocent sort. He always grew melancholy as he thought of past glories, the brilliant days of his life, the choice annual, bound in silk, now closed fatally,

it would seem, for ever. He went upstairs a little depressed.

Mr. Lumley walked over briskly to Mrs. Talbot, who was in her most graceful sitting attitude, like the tinted Chalon rival. "I have got the name for you. Memory must obey your directions; there is no help for it. It *was* Hardman."

Mrs. Talbot half rose, from the start, a light was in her eye, "What! not *Rosa Hardman?*"

"I declare, yes, though. How did you know?"

"Why, they are neighbours of ours."

"My goodness, no;" said Mr. Lumley, in a little alarm. "Then I must ask you to be a little careful, it's so long ago, and things get magnified; and—really I am not sure."

But Mrs. Talbot was scarcely attending to him. She was in a reverie. When

later, Mr. Lumley was taken up to the snuggest of bed-chambers, she remained up by her own fireside, looking really brilliant, and like her picture.

CHAPTER VIII.

ROSA'S HOUSEHOLD.

It being now known that the little settlement was to lose the agreeable —th Regiment and its colonel, who were ordered off to Malta, there was much regret expressed. The local paper expressed the conventional eulogium of "both officers and men having endeared themselves to all by their courteous bearing, soldier-like steadiness," &c. The "men" were of the usual type, getting drunk about as often or as seldom as other regiments; occasionally using their belts in a public-house row, and making themselves as acceptable as they could to the maids and wives of the

place. Colonel Labouchere and his officers, however, deserved more commendation. They were really a "nice" set; gentlemanly, and with a simplicity and good nature which sits so attractively on a soldier. They had made many friends: had taxed their purses handsomely to return all civilities by many dinners and little entertainments. They were thus really regretted. Regiments, indeed, have quite as distinct dispositions as individuals; and in the service there are corps which are overbearing, empty-pated, and ungracious; extravagant, dissipated, and good-for-nothing; selfish, getting all they can and returning nothing; with not a few that are open-handed and amiable, and of the pattern of Colonel Labouchere's —th.

The commander himself often gives the tone. Sometimes he is a hardened old

campaigner—a modern Dalgetty—whose life in love, war, money, and everything has been one steady forage party, in which he has made everything turn to "provend." To hear him at the head of his mess-table, giving sound advice to his children,—cautioning them, instructing them how to get all they can, and smiling over anything that seems like "a do" of a civilian, is scarcely wholesome training. It is when he hears of some honest attachment in a young fellow that his fatal influence most prevails; and he grows brutal almost in his ridicule, and even threatens. "Leave her there," he says, "it's her own look out, a scheming lot they all are. I know 'em well. I wonder you can be such a d——d fool! Come, sir; I'll have no pauper marriages in my regiment. No women hoisted on the baggage-carts coming after us. Leave her! and serve her right."

The others, well trained by these excellent lectures, join in the contemptuous cry. The youth grows abashed, and the victim generally is left. "Bless your lucky stars in your prayers, if you say 'em, that I saved you, my boy, from that parson's daughter. She's gone off by this time with some attorney's clerk."

Of quite a different sort was Colonel Labouchere—a man more like an agreeable country gentleman than stern chief of a regiment. In unmarried men of his time of life and of his character, and in that service, there is a certain charm. Indeed, a certain famous and witty lady has said that no man ever could begin to be agreeable until forty-five years old. So have young ladies been heard to declare that they admire this class of man—something grave enough to look up to, and yet quite familiar enough to associate with and

love. The colonel's age was not so much as this; he was liked by all, though there were but faint hopes of his being secured in the honourable tie of marriage. It was understood that there had been some early disappointment, which had driven him from the plan of entering the church into the army, where he had, perhaps, hoped—so the young ladies arranged it—for an early death.

He had been foremost in encouragement of the hospitality of his corps, and stimulated those drawings on their modest resources which furnished forth—not coldly, by any means—their repeated luncheon tables and balls. His subscription was always the handsomest. The good people of the country, seeing him always with the Talbot family, arranged, as the manner of such is, that he had designs on Miss Livy. In such a society the presence

of motive is always insisted on for the most indifferent action—as well dance a valse without a partner, as do an act without a motive.

When news of this farewell entertainment was spread abroad there was sincere regret. At The Towers, Mrs. Hardman received the card, and brought it in to her husband in his gilt study, as it really might be called. There he affected a ministerial air of office: answering "my letters," receiving interviews with "my servants," and, very often, with the duke's coachman, who had become very exacting and exorbitant in his demands, and, on the slightest demur, would present his resignation, like a pistol, at the head of his employer. How that employer longed and prayed that he could have *genuine* work of the real something official, or *quasi* official, membership — the most

trifling office! But, then, a contest was fearful to think of; and, it being known that he had money, his very presence at any borough was a challenge. He was willing to give a certain sum, but actually hesitated at a thousand or so more; for meanness, avarice, and the foolish improvidence which will lose the thousand pounds already spent, rather than try and save it by two hundred more, all sat side by side in his miserable soul. He spent, and then grew unhappy and saved. His house was really only a theatre: at most times dark, cold, mean, shabby, and, on a few occasions, lit up with a false and tinsel splendour, and the public admitted.

Yet he was romantic in a certain sense, and lived in quite a world of dreams. He was always picturing himself as his portrait in the dining-room. He would sit hours

in his study, besides having nothing else to do, with his elbows on the arms of his chair and his fingers touching: seeing himself in his official room: "I regret, gentlemen," he would say to the deputation, "it will be out of my power to recommend Government to do anything for you in this matter. Irrigation is, no doubt, a great matter; and the state can never be indifferent to the claims of waste lands. But I should deceive you, and deceive myself, were I to hold out any hopes," &c. He had a hundred various attitudes of this sort; and would as it were, wake up wearied and disheartened. He had, however, an old mercantile pertinacity—an obtrusive offering of his good offices and services, which sometimes extracted, even for shame's sake, some return from those he so obliged. There was a certain "lord" whom he had met

at some board, who had a son in Parliament and some influence himself, and on whom he had quite fastened. His perseverance was long-continued, without result; but at last he contrived to be of some practical use, by a sort of "fluke," as it is called, and succeeded in laying Lord Bindley under a positive obligation.

On this very morning we are speaking of, a letter had come from that nobleman, asking him to Bindley, the first house of genuine condition he had succeeded in breaking into. He held counsel in his room: his hand under his waistcoat, as in the famous picture. The lord—his lord—would now do everything for him; would get *him* office—a seat, perhaps—anything. This was all he asked; one foot on the first round of the ladder—once *that* established, others should draw him up. With a really powerful mind such a

"first round" *is* the first step to success, and not the victory itself; but with minds of this gentleman's pattern it seems the *last* round of the ladder. Their stupid vision confounds means with the ends. And thus Mr. Hardman sat in his pompous throne of an arm-chair, looking at space with an official scorn, refusing places, and dismissing deputations. Everything would follow as a matter of course. Bindley was seriously embarrassed; he had a younger son, Reginald, the Honourable Reginald Bindley, who should marry *her*.

He sent for his daughter. It would be impossible to give an idea of his inflated reception of her. It was as one who should say, "What would you all be without *me*; I plan everything." Yet, on more ordinary occasions it was believed that he stood in awe of her. She had a

quiet and superior manner, in presence of which he was abashed.

"Well, papa?" she said.

"I have sent for you," he answered, "to tell you of a very important matter. I have received a letter from my friend Lord Bindley, asking us to his house —to stay—to stop with him for a week. I expected this, and I knew he would. There will, of course, be all sorts of influential people there."

"Well, I suppose you will go and stay the week. Is there anything else?"

"Of course, you can't understand these things; it can hardly be expected, as you have taken no trouble in bringing it about, either leading up to, or planning—"

"Leading up to a visit—planning it?" she repeated, as if in astonishment.

"Yes. All seems quite smooth, of course, to you. You only enjoy the

fruits. I have the labour. However, you and your mother will get ready to go."

"Of course," said she. "But I shall find no pleasure in such things; nor will you, papa. We shall be out of our sphere; these people will look down on us. No expenditure of money, no time or labour can ever triumph over that. I know it—see it in a thousand little things that escape you. With all that forcing our way and struggling, they are sure to turn at last, if we at all interfere with them; and a word or a look is enough to drive us down again. Ah! you know it is so, papa; for I have seen you suffer from it."

"Oh, I don't follow this at all; you are talking of what you cannot understand. You are a fool!"

"I have always said," she went on, as if talking to herself, "that it would be a far more honourable, and a far more suc-

cessful, way of getting on, to try and rise in our own sphere; to try and cope with our set, and compete with them. These lords don't suit us, and are of no use."

Mr. Hardman trembled with rage. "We shall go to Lord Bindley's on Monday next; so you will be ready. I did not send for you to hear *your* views, but to state mine. If you are a fool, I am not one."

"I could not go on Monday next," she said, quite calmly, her round eyes fixed on him passively, and without any defiance. "You know we have promised Colonel Labouchere for Wednesday."

"I don't care about that. Do you dare to oppose me in this way?" he said, rising up. "What is this coming to? What is the meaning of it?"

"I would not disoblige him for a thousand lords. He is going away the next

week, and he is giving it for us—for *me.*"

"Yes; that is another thing," said her father, very red and excited, and walking about. "A fine person you are taking up. But don't begin thwarting me, I warn you. I have put up with that game long enough in my own house."

"I don't want to thwart you, papa. But I am determined not to expose ourselves to stupid insults."

"I don't want this at all. I don't choose to enter on it. If you like to take up with beggarly fellows of this sort you may; but you pack out of this, ma'am, and without a farthing; and we shall see what he will say *then.* Ah!" he saw her colouring, "I have you there, I think. That brings it to a focus."

"Yes; in the usual way," she repeated with scorn. "But I do not know what

Colonel Labouchere's views are. I have no idea of 'taking up,' as you call it, with anyone. But I am determined that we must not appear ungracious or unkind, or give them *cause* to say that people of our condition are as *vulgar* in mind as they think us in other directions."

"This settles it!" he said in a fury. "Things are coming to a nice pass, indeed. Then, I tell you, I mean to have my way. It was I who made my money and my house, and you would be a beggar but for me. You shall do as I bid you, or take your own way; and if I wish you to marry anyone—to Lord Bindley's son, the Hon. Reginald—you shall do it, or be a beggar."

She smiled. "The Honourable Reginald! When has he come on the scene? Where is he?"

"Nothing to you, or to anyone but

me. You shall go with me to Bindley, and no bones about it."

"Not until Thursday morning, papa. I am sorry to go against your wishes in so trifling a point, but you will be glad of it yourself later."

He was speechless now. He had not a strong will, no force in bearing down opposition. He had only bluster, which is a brush of feathers.

So the matter ended—as she knew it would, and, as he had an uneasy feeling all through, it must—in his giving way. His poor pride would not let him do so openly, so he was mean enough to invent the arrival of "a put off" from Lord Bindley "until Thursday or Friday morning, whichever was most convenient." This he affected to read out. He might have seen in his daughter's face, only he had not courage to look there, how well

she knew the untruth of this subterfuge. No wonder she was considered a "strange girl," or that "the duke's coachman" pronounced her an "etarnal jibber." No one understood the secret of her singular mind, or what thoughts and theories were working within her—how sensitive she was on the score of the very thing she affected to make little account of, namely, their rise and their having "made their money." Not but that she would have accepted and adorned a poorer position; but it was the mean, paltry strain, the really "vulgar" aping of what was above, which had attended their family all through—from the very earliest days of her childhood—that had worked into her very inmost soul.

This never-failing spectacle—this ogre, which never deserted them—was to her one of positive horror. It had embittered

everything. Figuratively, as it were, she had seen her father struggling, suffering, agonising, crawling on all-fours, to win "a shake-hands," or a "shake-finger" even, from a person only two rounds on the ladder above him. When he was the small partner, with a small house, he was crawling and agonising to be noticed by his gentleman neighbour. It took him a whole year of labour and meannesses to get this gentleman to dine with him—a person who would have been glad, on a week's acquaintance, to have a plain, honest man, who had made his own money, sitting at his table. The gentleman was disgusted with the mixed servility and arrogance of his host, and never dined with him, or had *him* to dine, again. When he grew wealthier, and had plate, there was the baronet, whom he worked as hard to gain, and almost failed as

egregiously in that case, except that the baronet had some object in view, and stomached "the offensive vulgarity of the fellow, thrusting his staring, silver Birmingham stuff on a gentleman in that way!"

In that household there were no soft pleasures, no tranquil currents of smooth life, drifting onwards; and the young girl, as she moved upward, lived as on a stage, with deception and trickeries all about her—meanness and bitterness and sourness (carefully concealed from the audience), hollowness, jealousies, and quarrelling. Had she started under other conditions, she would have been a warm, even romantic, girl, with prodigious sense, and even genius; and had her dull, low, boor of a father wit enough to learn something and forget a good deal, he would have found her a better auxiliary

than all his plate, and daubed gilding, and powdered servants. She might have led him gently and successfully on to those charming and select *parterres*, for the *entrée* to which he would almost have given one of his eyes. She would have done a thousand times more for him than his duke's coachman, and the wretched machinery which that figure represented. The vulgar pride of the "fellow," for such he was, prevented him seeing anything; and the truth was, he had a jealous suspicion of this power of hers, and he would have almost preferred to have remained as he was, than be indebted to her. From her childhood, then, at every turn, she was thus met; every honest impulse turned back, turned in upon herself, — just as a painstaking gardener would lop and clip a luxuriant shrub. Every hour almost of her life had

been marked by some such check. There was no kindly and genial cultivation; everything was dry, cold, hard, miserable, uninteresting. The only breaks were the victorious acquisition of "a shake-hands," or a call even, from some of the illustrious above; and the coarse jubilation, the arrogant exultation was as bad.

With surprisingly quick eyes she looked on, and like the blind, whose sense of touch is preternaturally sharpened, her vision, before which there was a cloud at home, became sharpened as she looked abroad; and it was like a revelation, as every moment she saw, or guessed at, the looks of contempt, of meaning, of amusement, as her father made his fruitless and contemptible efforts. And this feeling of being quite degraded produced in her a hostility, a bitter rage against the world, a wish to punish, to idemnify herself for

what she *felt was deserved*, yet what she resented. This was the secret of her character, of her manner, of a slow and ever-burning resentment, and what also made people say she was "a strange sort of girl;" and it is for this reason that so much time has been given to her description.

Therefore it was that to the family of "Beauty Talbot," and for the "Lady" of Beauty Talbot, she had a special repulsion. The clear eyes of the well-trained lady of fashion seemed to read off the whole story of their life, as from a well-printed book.

No one knew what agony this process was to her, no one could guess it. The quick eyes and quick ears saw and heard the revealed piece of vulgarity, the burst of "low" nature gushing forth, the grave face with the smile of amusement and

contempt, scarcely concealed, nay, even the sense of enjoyment in these escapades; all tortured the heart of the manufacturer's daughter. She grew at last to regard the other as a dreadful devilish enemy, because associated with such *refined* tortures. Nor was it surprising that the other lady, conscious of this power, should amuse herself by the exhibition, and find in the exercise of this Indian-like torture, an assertion of her superiority in those country districts, and reflection of old, old triumphs. The son had much of this sensitiveness rubbed off by mess, or military life. He was very little at home, and did not see much of the ways of his father.

Had the brother and sister joined forces, the rebellion would not, perhaps, have overpowered her state; but would certainly have led to a break-up of the

whole. For her father had no decency in his resentments, and, to carry some petty household point, would not scruple to exhibit his animosity before the whole public, and shamelessly "gird" at his daughter in a low, brutal way, with "gills" glowing, and fishy eyes flaming. Sooner than give in, on some wretched point, where his dignity—this with his child!—was concerned, he would have had a scandal—a turning out of doors. He did not know the refined art of hiding the wolf of a domestic quarrel under one's coat or cloak; nor could he, with smiles, allow the brute to gnaw his entrails out, sooner than reveal to others the discredit. This Spartan self-sacrifice is the highest the world can expect; and though in this matter of the ball he would have pushed affairs to extremity, the sacrifice of her visit altogether affected his selfishness too

nearly, and he consented to the compromise. This, then, was the atmosphere, malaria rather, of that household. With all their wealth they were poor, with all this struggling to rise, they remained low, with all their luxuries they had no enjoyment of comforts, though the minds of some of the household often possessed the idea that it was something like that conventional "Hell upon earth."

CHAPTER IX.

"AD MISERICORDIAM."

THE morning of this ball, which even for persons in the district who had long ceased to care for such entertainments, had an interest, from the very rarity, Old Dick Lumley went out for a walk, to keep himself in health and tone. He did not mind going by himself, as he could walk with an extraordinary and unnatural rapidity. This process he fancied kept that dreadful enemy of his, "Old Time" —the thought of a worse one he never let near him—effectually at a distance. People were amused to see his brisk, jerking figure rattling along at express speed.

Here he went by, quite blown with his exertion, in a young man's wide-awake, a light lounging suit, and his gaudy tie. He always said that "you can wear what would be considered staring vulgar colours, if you make it a habit, part of yourself, as it were." He, too, was looking forward to the ball. As he was returning home, very wheezy indeed after his exercise, he noted the great coach, gaudy and heavy, which seemed to quite fill up the little enclosure, and whose wheels had torn absolute trenches in the soft gravel. The great horses looked embarrassed, as if they had got into some little inconvenient cage or stall. The duke's coachman was on the box. Miss Hardman had come to pay a visit of state to Mrs. Talbot. She had been there about a quarter of an hour.

Mrs. Talbot had a grim look, quite

unlike the elegant vacuity of the Chalon picture, as she went in. She assumed she was going to battle. Yet she was surprised at being met with quite a deferential and submissive air. The look on Mrs. Talbot's face seemed to say, "What an extraordinary visitor! you have paid your formal visit already, and it has been duly returned; we honoured you by going to your dinner. You are not going to encroach now?" The accompaniment to this was an air of cold insolence in which, as mentioned, she was unrivalled. The other, for a moment, returned it, and seemed inclined to join battle—Mrs. Talbot, waiting for her to explain the object that had brought her there. In a cold way that showed that her heart was not in the subject, though she was trying to make herself agreeable, Rose Hardman spoke of the event of the

time, the military ball. "You, of course, are going?" she asked. "Colonel Labouchere told me so."

There was a proprietorship in her tone that Mrs. Talbot did not like.

"I suppose so," she said; "it seems to be an event of vast importance. It convulses the country far and near. So he is leaving? The old story, 'They love and they ride away!' From the little drummer, even, up to the field officer. What grief, what tears there will be!"

The other was listening abstractedly. "Our maid," she said, quite seriously and naturally, "*is* sighing after a faithless corporal lover."

"Then your father, who is so rich, would do a charitable act in buying his discharge, and setting them up. But it is always the poor people who do such acts of generosity, not your millionaires.

Though I should not blame him after that funny expedition he made here the other day. It was so goodnatured of him; but there was a simplicity about the proceeding that has amused us ever since. The great carriage and the picture carried out; we did not know what was coming next."

Rosa's eyes flashed. "Goodnature seems always ridiculous. It was meant well, I know." Then she seemed to put a restraint on herself.

"It was so droll," went on Mrs. Talbot in polite enjoyment. "I did not know what to make of it. It was very kind and all that; but I am surprised your father would not have known I could not have accepted such a present after a few hours' acquaintance."

"My father," said the girl calmly, "is a simple, rough man, and you know by honourable ways he has become what he

is. To raise himself as he has done requires virtues and gifts that are honourable, and rare, and must be respected. Now, what I would ask you, and what I have come to ask you for, is this. You have seen what is called fashionable life, and know all the refinements of ceremonial. They are, as far as I can see, merely on the surface; but be that as it may, I am sure you will not refuse me this."

It was strange the instinctive dislike Mrs. Talbot had to this girl. That cold superior gaze challenged her. She felt her lip curling, and something prompted her to exercise her tongue.

"What is coming?" she went on. "Good gracious! this solemnity is quite alarming. You are not going to ask me to accept a picture, are you?"

Rosa coloured; but again restrained herself.

"I say," she went on, "we are of the 'Newly rich class,' as the French say; and we have not had experience of many things, with which those more fortunate in their birth and education have been gifted. They may be advantages or not—I cannot tell. But there are redeeming things, and in this district, this little place, I would ask you to be forbearing and generous to my father and to our household. For these things are felt acutely, trifling as they are."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Talbot, growing nettled at "being preached to" by the girl. "This is growing quite melodramatic! I really don't follow you, for of course you have learned, or at least your father has, that everyone in this world must take their chance, and not be *too* sensitive."

"It is for *him*, not for us! There can

be no pleasure in telling things about, and holding honest people up as ridiculous, and," she added, earnestly and significantly, "I could repay you in a way that you might like."

"Repay me!" repeated the lady of the house, haughtily; "repay *me*, Miss Hardman? I am at a loss to understand you. This is nearly as amusing as Mr. Hardman's picture."

Rosa looked at her with scorn. Suddenly was announced at the door, "Mr. Lumley!" and in fluttered and bustled that cheerful gentleman. As Rose Hardman turned pale and half rose, Mrs. Talbot looked with smiling triumph on the situation. She really had instinctive dislike to the girl. "Mr. Lumley, Miss Hardman," she said.

It was hard to surprise Old Dick Lumley, or, at least, make him *show*

surprise. He had great tact, too, and at once fell into a neutral tone which might express that he had known her well, or had just met her in a crowd. It was indifferent, and no one could decide. Dick Lumley was rattling on about his walk, and the fine air, and about all he saw, and the clergyman who asked him in "to have a glass of wine," and how the clergyman's wife was curiously connected with his dear old Lady Hubbard—"so we got on famously." The truth was, we might set Mr. Lumley down in any district of the kingdom, and he would be certain to "root out" some one connected with a "dear Lady Hubbard." This amazing charm is given to few, and is worth vast sums of money; while there are many who might be in the same hotel with their own father and mother, and not find it out. He was too adroit to recal their acquaint-

ance; but Mrs. Talbot did. "You told us, you know, you had met this lady in Ireland, I think."

"Yes; long ago, though," said Dick Lumley, bowing to Miss Hardman with a confidential air, that said, "Ah! Traitor! you are safe." "The quantities of young ladies I meet with is amazing. The mammas now bring them out in flocks, five at a time. Like old Lady Annible. It confuses a man, and it's not fair."

"Yes—you told us of Mr. Strachey's house in Ireland," she went on, pitilessly.

Dick Lumley was quite a match for her. In his walk he had seen The Towers, and respected it as an establishment. He had asked and learned a good deal about it also. The carriage and horses spoke for themselves. So did the Duke's coachman, with whom, had he chosen, he could have found out some mysterious

rapport. He was much provoked he had been betrayed into that foolish story. He would be more careful in future: though alas, during these months he was wagging on to eighty. "My dear Mrs. Talbot I was a devoted slave of a certain young lady at that time, and she certainly recals to me, Miss Hardman—a cousin?" he asked, in an insinuating way.

Rosa tossed her head; then rose to go. "I thought," said Mrs. Talbot, "Miss Hardman had come to offer me a picture which Mr. Hardman was good enough to surprise me with——"

Rosa, as she said "Good morning," gave her a look there was no mistranslating, which meant, "You shall repent this, you have made me humble myself in vain!" then swept out, and was borne away in her great carriage. Mr. Lumley said, gravely, "O come; I say, that wasn't

fair on me. A fine girl, too! I tell you it can't be the same, now that I think of it. You oblige me, my dear Mrs. Talbot, to find that out. But I tell you what, don't offend that girl, if you have not done so already—eh?"

"O!" said Mrs. Talbot, contemptuously rustling her dress, "these low creatures! Why, I could have them brushed off, as I could get my maid to brush the dust off my boots. I should like nothing better than to put the whole set down; it would be like my going-out days, when I put down so many!"

But Old Lumley was pettish. Any risk of annoyance, any possible loss of dinners, stopping in houses, &c., was so disagreeable, and as he thought, "chopped a bit out of his life." "Such a childish thing, going about repeating things, and to the very girl herself! Dragging me into such

a business; quite a want of taste and tact!" Thus Old Lumley afterwards grumbled to himself as he dressed for the ball. But with all the satisfaction of a little malice, he hinted to Mrs. Talbot. "That's a clever and dangerous woman, that, trader's daughter as she is. I'd be rather afraid of her, and if I was you I would give her the right hand of fellowship, or even, ha! ha! the tip of the little finger of toleration, ha! ha!"

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Talbot. "She only wants to be kept in her place. And I think I have given these people a lesson that will keep them in their place all the time they are in the parish," and Mrs. Talbot, smiling complacently at herself in the glass, and leaning on her arched wrist, felt not a little the flush of a triumph. She had the true training, after all; she looked and was a high-bred, handsome, elegant woman still.

CHAPTER X.

THE BALL.

The officers were quartered in the little town, in an old institution—Poor-house, most likely—which had been converted, like some of their arms, after a new pattern, into barracks. Additional buildings had made it very comfortable and convenient. The centre building, now seen at a distance, about nine o'clock of this night, was lighted up cheerfully, and seemed to hold out a far-off and encouraging invitation to the rustics standing about, and to the guests presently to be expected. Such an entertainment is exciting, in its way, even for those outsiders

not privileged with admission. For them the cheaper entertainment of standing in a crowd at the door, about the awning which the clever "handy man" of the regiment had put up; for in every corps there are plenty of these skilful craftsmen, who are delighted to find such an opportunity. That excitement of seeing the ladies descend in their fairy-land dresses—lovely, brilliant, seraphic almost—in gold and tulle, and costly fabrics, is a treat for the poor girls who must walk this earth along rude and rough roads. For them the warm and glittering blaze of light within, into which are absorbed the seraphic figures, the brilliant and sometimes lovely faces, revelations of another world.

Now drove up, in a pushing, elbowing way—just as the owner himself might have strode through a crowd, looking round for the police, and saying "it

was unbearable" — the great coach of the Hardmans, the Duke's coachman, shrouded in his capes, driving. Out got the rich man, and walked in through the lane, as if the whole show was for him, and the audience his. He was buttoned up tightly in his thin, short, blue coat, and gave his orders to Miller in a loud tone, very different from the one in which he addressed that officer in private; but this concession was well charged for in the wages, and the coachman tolerated it as addressed to his office, not to him.

"And see here, Miller, be here at two, will you? And come up promptly when I call you!"

The mob listened with awe; but still, with the instinct of a mob, they saw the acting; the duke's coachman seemed almost a greater man.

Inside there was a blaze of splendour—a tent-like robing room and boudoir for the ladies, that seemed their own room almost, with laces, and muslins, and maids, and a true feminine air. In the passages the deft sergeant-major and privates with a turn for handicraft had done wonders in disposing flags and cannon, and grouping bayonets and swords into stars and other figures, an exercise in which they take infinite delight, "beating," as one remarked, "Sou' Kensington itself."

There was a soft rustle and flutter of silk and satin and muslin drawn gently over carpet, as the innumerable little processions, Captain Mamma, rank-and-file daughters, trailed into the ball room, where Colonel Labouchere, C.B., and his Majors and leading supporters were grouped as hosts. There was even

a bashfulness and a little shyness in these good-natured warriors as they went through the function, which was no discredit to them, and if they could be persuaded of it, would become them vastly on more important occasions. The room was handsomely decorated—mirrors, scarlet sofas, little effective pet alcoves, on which a world of pains had been expended, and which the fond contrivers secretly expected would be the admired feature of the night; but which, like so many other things upon which a world of pains has been expended, were quite overlooked—submerged, as it were, in the general effect.

Mrs. Talbot and her party had already arrived, and were standing close to the military hosts, watching the guests make their entry, an occupation not at all devoid of humour or entertainment. The uncon-

sciousness, the nervousness of some provincials, to whom the situation was new, was the kind of amusement that quite suited the former *belle*. Mrs. Talbot, in right of her old service and the station she claimed socially, seemed to be the only one favoured with this privilege; her eyeglass travelling up and down, not with an open stare—she was too well bred for that, but conveying, as it were, that her sight was "near," and that she was looking for expected friends, yet at the same time planting a little tiny barb of a suspicion in the breasts of the more awkward that they were ridiculous.

This is the true and refined art, which may seem to have all the worth of rudeness, and at the same time keeps within the reserved pleasure grounds of good breeding. On that night she looked very distinguished—the bloom of the old ele-

gance floated about her—the ungenerous old man seemed ashamed, and gave his scythe rest from its eternal clipping, and the kindly and laborious arts of the untiring Livy had their reward. Among that crowd of rude and crude dressers, these ill-mannered, ill-kept, ill-clothed, ill-carried wives and maids, she looked the woman of elegance, who had fought and bled under the best soldiers of fashion. Her blooming child, excited, bright-eyed, and filled with delight and enjoyment at all she saw, was not unworthy of such a leader; but she, of course, wanted her mother's training. Even Phœbe, the sister, by the joint labours of every woman in the household, had been turned out with real effect and splendour; but the effort had been prodigious. Beauty Talbot himself, shedding sweet clouds of perfume as he walked—he, indeed, always deluged

himself, and his bill to Messrs. Piesse was really like his wine merchant's, comprising "so many dozens" of various bouquet vintages—was drawing on gloves of a matchless fit, and which, so far as importation and "dozens" and choiceness, were also like another wine bill. But these little luxuries, relics of the old "Beauty" life, were allowed to him with delight. They were overjoyed at such tastes, costly as they were, it, perhaps, being understood that they were rather extravagant safety valves. He was now scanning the battle field, eagerly buttoning the said gloves, looking out for the censers, which were, of course, to swing.

Such pains, by the whole party, had not been thrown away. The Colonel was at the ladies' feet. In every speech of his they seemed to gather, that everything they admired had been done for them. At

that stage of the night, "for *her*," was unreasonable; that would come later, as things warmed up. There was a gentleness, a softness, an almost tenderness, in his manner, that promised the best. He left the reception of succeeding provincials to his Major and other deputies. Mrs. Talbot herself laid the first gun.

"My dear Colonel Labouchere, we are all in such tribulation; and your going away spoils all our enjoyment in this charming ball. As for poor Phœbe, our poor Phœbe, she was not coming at all!"

"Not coming!" said the Colonel. "I can tell you that would have been an offence I never could have forgiven. I should have gone on board uncomfortable, thinking I had done something dreadful."

"I assure you it is the case. She is leaving us, too, poor girl! She has enjoyed herself greatly, and I can tell you is

very sorry for Colonel Labouchere's departure, as we all are."

Mrs. Talbot was not one of those who lay on hints coarsely and streaky, like scene-painters; yet the process was not less effective.

"The poor girl goes back to a dreadful place, near to a country town, quite unsuited to her. This has all been a little glimpse of Elysium to her."

"I have been very happy here also," said the Colonel, absently. "I have knocked about the world a great deal, and visited all sorts of places, and have never met such kindness, or persons I so like. We soldiers sometimes speak in an odiously patronising way, as if the kingdom was nothing but quarters, and to be viewed in reference to barracks only. I am grateful, I assure you; and deeply pained to go away."

A fresh arrival—one that made Mrs. Talbot's lip curl and her refined head jerk back. Enters now the Hardman party. Mamma, all afire in crimson satin, "old Vesuvius," one of the young officers said, who was called on to take her into supper; the calm, serious daughter—in her eyes cold embers of thought, yet holding conversation with Mrs. Talbot, and answering that lady's impatient toss as who should say, "We are asked as well as *you*. A great ball room, surely, is like the open street."

The Colonel, coming forward within the scorching glare of the crimson, shook hands with the party, and was returning to Mrs. Talbot, when he was arrested by Mr. Hardman.

"Very well done, all this; uncommonly well, Colonel. I suppose you'll have 'em dancing here till all hours?"

The Colonel never made any secret of his "imperfect sympathy" for the manufacturer, and always maintained a most distantly polite address to him.

"We shall be very glad if it amuses them; and shall be delighted to see them until morning."

"O, that's all very well; but I must think of my horses. My coachman, Miller, I can tell you—I had him, you know, from the Duke ——."

"You told me, I think," said the Colonel, gravely, "before. Will you excuse me now?"

The son, young Dick, has come up straight to Livy, and has borne her off into the waves of the enchanting waltz. The father looks vulgarly impatient and buttons his coat. It was only a necessary civility, but still there was a member's daughter, with many other "desirable

investments for captalists," as some of the prospectuses he read, would say. The first quadrille is then to be formed, and the Colonel leads out the Honourable Mrs. Talbot. Beauty, now very happy, and after beating many a covert, lights on little adoring "leveret" in her form, and complacently leads her to the van.

The host finds a major to take Miss Phœbe, and tells him "to come into our set," which he does. The happy girl could literally bound on the boards, as she had seen her sex do at the opera. He was looking at her with such interest—an *affectionate* interest, it seemed to her—and he engaged her for the next dance. Lancers, was it? She looked round, and there was the cold face, the thoughtful eyes expanding a good deal, and no doubt putting a number of questions: "What is the meaning of this neglect? Why is

this? Why is the preference given to her?" But wait until those Lancers come round, then her cup would be full, and drink it she should—dregs and all.

This young lady had learned some speeches by heart, as if for a play, "coached" by her eager sister—speeches of an enticing sort. She had others in reserve, of a more direct and challenging kind. Finally, she had a couple in reserve, to which the ingenuity of no man deliberating on escape, could find an answer, save one. She had been duly prompted in these artful measures. When then the last "shuffle" of the Lancers should be done, and Colonel Labouchere had led her enchanting form to those ball-room-glades and bosquets made for dalliance, there he should find himself at the worst, in an agreeable *cul-de-sac*.

During the present performance, Mrs.

Talbot judiciously left the matter where it was. It would glide down the incline of itself. He still maintained that *entente* which springs up in a quadrille when friends are all in the one set, though indeed a snarling guest remarked upon it, who had no partner—

"So ridiculous; as if they were all doing something so wonderful!"

But this was a mere glowering, disappointed "outsider," who knew no one, and had found all the "girls" engaged many, many deep.

That quadrille was over at last. Then came the eager, headlong galop, in which, as a coarse warrior remarked, they "put their 'mounts' well at it, and didn't spare whip or spur." The fine band in the gallery, far aloft, where its braying and blasting was inoffensive, was literally inspiring. Round and round, up and down,

rustled, jogged, stumbled, staggered, crushed, raced, and flew even, the excited couples. Then came the smoother and more entrancing motion of the valse, the more winged movement, the floating on sweet waves of a sad and plaintive music. Then the wished for quadrille.

CHAPTER XI.

WAR TO THE KNIFE.

NEVER was there so attentive and gracious a host. He passed over no one, and was not absorbed in too obsequious attention to the leading persons of rank; or, to use the more intelligible regimental vernacular, "the swells." What delighted, however, the neighbours, was the utter shipwreck of any hopes that their low, purse-proud, stuck-up Hardmans might have entertained. Where were their dinners now?—their outlay in state, their note-writing, driving to the barracks, their persecutions, in short, of that *true gentleman*, the Colonel, connected

with one of the first families, and who showed his real breeding and tact by the perfect way in which he had foiled their schemes.

Here was the end now, and "the man," as a dowager remarked, "was walking off clean and clear." As for our poor Phœbe, she was a mere bird-of-passage, and her claims had not attracted much public notice, or her efforts were too puny to be seriously dangerous. The great Hardman family sat up together—a small battalion, a row of idols, but with no worshippers. Mrs. Hardman, still in conflagration, conspicuous from afar — her husband — his head tightened back, and face showing his favourite mixture of arrogance, discontent, and mortification.

"A most ill-managed thing; most improperly arranged; no attention, &c.," he was saying to his lady. An undeserved

slander upon their host, who had been strictly impartial. But to the former manufacturer, attention to him must be in exact proportion to neglect of others. The daughter sat placid, and, better trained than her family, showed no discontent—rather seemed utterly indifferent to the neglect. The rustics little knew her, or how Spartan she could be under public mortification. They watched her still more, as, at the end of "the Lancers," the Colonel passed by, the ecstatic Phœbe on his arm, transported with rapture at the coming proposal which, as she learned from certain "meaning words" of his, was now at hand.

As she passed by her sister, she stopped for an enthusiastic whisper, under pretext of a settling of her necklace, or something as important. Mrs. Talbot thought the words were "all right"—that happy

speech which, a thousand times used, has brought joy and comfort. Has Rosicrucian won? "All right!"—Have the jury found? "All right!"—What did the doctor say? "All right!"—Well, you were late; I knew you would be. "All right!"—Does he agree? "All right!" And finally—well, what did she say? "All right!" Happiest talisman in the language, and which the French have now borrowed from us.

Mrs. Talbot was approaching the flame. The fickle and stout lady bridled among her many laces. The old belle's eyes lighted as she saw her cold enemy sitting neglected.

The daughter regarded her, with what seemed to the other a look of mixed dislike and discomfiture. In the large round eyes there was uneasiness, and a direct challenge. Mrs. Talbot's reply was

a quiet look towards a far-off doorway, towards which the Colonel and his partner were hurrying. She began the contest again.

"You seem not to be enjoying the night," she said, with a smile.

That smile had lain by many years, a little dusty, among other fashionable properties. With it, and that simulated commiseration and sympathy, how many rivals had she pricked and stabbed.

"Most ill-managed thing as ever I saw," said Mr. Hardman. "No introductions—no looking after the people. Positively, but that I ordered my coachman for two o'clock—"

Said Mrs. Talbot, calmly, "Well, we were thinking they were so attentive—such charming hosts, and all that. You must have been unfortunate."

"My father," said his daughter, "does

not come often to balls, and expects an attention which may now perhaps be considered old-fashioned."

Mr. Hardman turned on her in his most arrogant way,—

"Old-fashioned! What are you *talking* about? Did you ever hear such speeches! There's Sir Thomas Rumbold! a man I could buy and sell ten times over, and to see the slavish toadying of him that has been going on the whole night is disgusting!"

"My dear Mr. Hardman," said Mrs. Talbot, as if she was paying him some sweet compliment, "this is one of the hard shifts of our present social arrangements. Rank and that sort of thing are somehow unfairly destined to have precedence."

This pierced even the horny skin of the monied man, about as thin as that of a rhinoceros.

"I see what you mean," he said; "but let me tell you that sort of thing is going by, and will go by, yet more."

Just at that moment she heard the cheery clatter of the friendly voice swinging away behind her, and "Old Dick Lumley" came up talking away as fast as he walked. He was never strange in a strange place, and had the art of either knowing people everywhere, or of appearing to know them. To mere observers of the surface, that is to average worldlings, this came to the same thing. Wherever he went, Dick Lumley took care he should fall upon his old legs. He made absent people do the work for him. It was his animated interview with Sir Thomas Rumbold that had so inflamed Mr. Hardman; yet the name of some friend, at least three hundred miles away, had performed the friendly offices of introduction.

"Well, we are all carrying it on hard and fast, not losing a moment. See how exhausted I am! By the by, just heard about poor old Lady Towler. Not left a sixpence after all her drudgery. But, my *dear* Mrs. Talbot, you must come off with me. There is a supper-room, or a tray of something, somewhere."

Now there was a flutter among the dowagers; much as at the Zoological Gardens, towards four o'clock, the wild animals grow excited if a keeper pass by with even a basket. Supper was indeed announced. Everyone was trooping in, and there was even seen what Old Dick Lumley called the "indelicate spectacle of droves of women hurrying in companionless." Colonel Labouchere was busy with his duties of host. He actually came for Mr. Hardman to take in Lady Rumbold, thereby overwhelming that gentleman

with an obsequious gratitude. It was when both were away on this errand that Miss Hardman turned to Mrs. Talbot, and said in her calm way, as though she was remarking "How cold it was"—

"All warning is thrown away on you."

But here was Colonel Labouchere back again, eager, hurried, with a gentleman in custody for Mrs. Hardman. He could hardly escape the streams of molten lava that flowed down the sides of that volcano. Then he turned to Mrs. Talbot.

"Now I am free," he said, "you must come into supper with me."

Then it was that she thought of answering the speech the manufacturer's daughter had made her.

"All warning! Really, now! Well, we shall see;" and she swept on.

The supper was in the best taste, and the messman had done it sumptuously.

To do honour to the occasion, he had exhausted himself in all the pictorial but uninviting emblems which his brethren delight in when they want to be more than equal to the occasion. Old Dick Lumley, whose old stomach had been kept working for some seventy-five years, protested loudly against these devices. "I hate," he said, "to see harps, and birds, and coats of arms sprawling over a fine Yorkshire ham. You cannot cut it with comfort." Mrs. Talbot merely went to look at the table.

"You see that wonderful old man? Old Dick Lumley they call him. Such energy, such unflagging spirit; it is really charming. I feel quite obliged to him; I quite love him for it. All the amusing stories, too, the curious histories he has ferreted out."

The Colonel was abstracted, and look-

ing over at the other side of the table.

"Yes," went on Mrs. Talbot, quickly; "and the oddest thing he gave us to-day at dinner; such a strange account of a particular friend of yours. Volunteered it, I assure you; for we have no interest in the people."

"What," said the Colonel, "about her? Was it bad, good, or indifferent?"

"Well, I am afraid I should have to call it something like one of the three; but really I am indifferent about the matter."

"But you have made me curious. No food for the gossips, I trust—no scandal?"

"About your Queen Elizabeth? Well, I am not accountable. I told you it was volunteered."

He looked at Mrs. Talbot with a curious intelligence. That lady became disturbed.

"Tell me, what do you think of Miss Hardman?" asked the Colonel, abruptly.

This was the opening Mrs. Talbot was longing for.

"You would not thank me," she said, "if I were to give you a candid opinion. I do not like her. You ask me, and I tell you the truth candidly. Another might smile, and insinuate all sorts of wicked accusations."

"No," he said, "I am sure it is all perfectly above board, as they say, with you; but simply for curiosity's sake, what do you think of her?"

"Well, then," said she, "first, what do I think of her relations? With *me*, the fruit is always to be known by its tree. *She* is not to blame for coming of a set whose gentility, delicacy, sympathy, and refinement, and every nice feeling have been hackled and torn to shreds by the carders of their factory. Look at the coarse father, the odious mother, and ask

yourself if any good could come out of that Nazareth?"

"Well," he answered, quietly, "I did put that very question to myself some months ago, and have tested the matter very carefully."

"Why on earth should you do that?" she said, with a surprise almost natural.

"Well," he answered, "when I first saw her, I think on the very first day we arrived here—and here we are at the very last night—there was something about her that seemed to challenge inquiry, and to be worth inquiring about. You know these sorts of faces and figures. We see them even in a crowd; the rest make a mere back-ground for her. I knew she had a history, a history that meant struggling straight upwards, struggling against something at home, something that would bear itself, home and all and everything,

to the surface. Of course, I had nothing to suggest this to me; but still you know how irresistible such an impression is."

There was something like amazement in Mrs. Talbot's face. She was surprised into actually staring at him; but these light vapours of expression drifted away to the right and to the left, and gave place to one of her ball-room masks.

"Shall I tell you?" she said, and she was very unlike the Chalon picture. "I have an irresistible impression also. You know I am a woman of the world, just as you are a soldier of the world, and I can pretty well see behind all this poetising about faces that challenge and struggle upwards, carrying their entire homes with them upon their fairy-like shoulders. I could tell you, Colonel Labouchere, what all this means, in what they call plain

English; and what is more," she added, her lips struggling between the tightness of spitefulness and an ordinary smile, "I could unfold for you some incidents in the process of that struggle upwards, which have been mysteriously revealed to me; for I see where you are hurrying to, and you may thank me for it later."

"Would not that be real charity and good nature of you?" he said, quite gravely. "In a friend, certainly."

"No. You do not thank a person," she said, "who puts out his hand to stop your going over a precipice. It is a mere instinct. But does it not look like a providence that a pleasant old gossip was sent here to us with his usual bag of stories on his back, and at our dinner-table should have pulled out this very one; the moment he heard the name he began —names, dates, everything exact. Mind

you ask me. There I stop, unless you wish me to go on."

There was great elation in Mrs. Talbot's eyes. She was playing her trumps one upon the other, in the hasty triumph of her success. It seemed like one of the old games, long, long ago.

He smiled. "You know there is always some sort of scandalous story about everyone that rises in life."

"Yes," she answered, quickly; and the absent, questioning face of Phœbe, who passed by them on the arm of a gorgeous partner, stirred her; "but not a *true* scandalous story. There is the difference."

"Well, *yours*—I mean Mr. Lumley's—may not be a true one."

She looked excited at the contradiction.

"You shall see and know that it is. I have gone too far, or you have made

me go too far, not to go on further. Surely no one could be justified in thinking so highly of a woman who by the tact and promptitude of some mere acquaintances was saved from the discredit of an elopement. That's plain speaking!"

She paused to see the effect of this astounding revelation, for she had now surely beaten both the opposite players. The rude old claymore of the manufacturer's daughter was no match after all for the small rapier of the elegant woman of fashion. She was a little ashamed of the means which she had used; rather coarser than the ones to which she was accustomed. The enemy had lost and Phœbe might win yet; and if there was a bold charge while the squares were in confusion, might win too before the morning came. The Colonel seemed taken aback.

"Ireland is a long way off," at length he said, slowly.

"Ireland?" she repeated.

"Stories that come across in the packets with the mails," he said, "get knocked about or distorted during the passage, and with old Lumley in charge——"

"Oh, I see. So it is notorious—and you, going about from garrison to garrison—if you wish to learn details, then, ask our old gossip, Lumley, and he will pour them out for you. Well, I had thought more highly of Colonel Labouchere."

"I could tell you all the details. I heard them long ago—Lady Boreena and all."

"Who from, pray?"

"From herself."

"From herself?" she repeated, slowly.

"Yes, from herself; and with the

greatest candour. She is a fine, open character, though with faults."

"Oh, I see. I *begin* to see now."

"Yes, I know what you are going to say. She tells me everything *now*. There is a wonderful confidence established between us, Mrs. Talbot. That wicked story did not affect me in the least. It has added to my high opinion of her."

"You are deliciously credulous. And that confidence was not provoked by the fear of its reaching you in some other way. It is nothing to me, of course; but as we *are* balancing evidence like a court——"

"I can satisfy the court on that also. She told me long ago: Mr. Lumley has been here only a day or two."

"It is no matter in the world," said Mrs. Talbot, now her old self again. "You must settle the matter between

yourself and the lady. I could not determine, I am sure. Now, shall we go back?"

They went back. The rueful Phœbe received them with a sort of distraught look; it seemed, at last, to have burst on her that all was over. A curious tempest was in Mrs. Talbot's breast: it was, as she felt, a ridiculous craze in *her;* for with a person of *that* sort—"raised from the very scum"—how on earth could her proceedings affect a lady of Mrs. Talbot's quality? But she was mortified; and perhaps this "low" soldier wished to mortify her.

So the ball went into the small hours dramatically. For some there, it was the usual enchanting thing; for certain votaries, for whom time glided on, alas! too exquisitely. It was all lights and flowers, and sweet faces, and waves of

music, and whirl-whirl! On this earth, and in those early days, before the novelty has worn away, there is nothing half so sweet in life—no, not a fiftieth part so delicious—as the progress of a ball: the dance after dance, the too exquisite and endless turning, the rings of soft light eddying round and round. This, indeed, is what approaches nearest to a dream for the young. They hear the chimes, not at midnight, but at three, four, five, and six, and a sweet and excited face wonders at the obtrusive daylight coming in so cold, and wonders that papa or mamma think of going home.

It was strange, the coming out on the steps, and seeing the streaks of daylight, the clustering of white-cloaked maids and matrons.

Beauty Talbot had had a pleasant night; his wife had been lax in her duty—so had

his daughter. The young girls were good-natured, and did not "snub" him.

Mrs. Talbot was moving to the door; the rich man's daughter going away also. The latter came up straight to her, and said in a low voice—

"That was a worthy act of yours; it now passes out of mere polite hostility. It was an unworthy *stab in the dark!*"

"Miss Hardman!" said the other with dignity.

"With all your animosity against me, I could not have believed a lady of your rank and birth capable of it." Her eyes were glowing, her cheek flushed; she seemed moved, for once, to anger. "I shall never forget it, even though it has failed so signally, as it deserved to do. I was reluctant to go, and, I own it, to accept Colonel Labouchere's generous proposals—"

"What!" faltered Mrs. Talbot, in spite of herself.

"His proposal of his hand. But this has determined me; for it has shown that you and your class can have no quarter, no heart or toleration for us. Now, I tell you, Mrs. Talbot, there shall be none for you. Here he comes now," she added, with a change of voice. "Good night! Everything will be very sudden; and I may never meet you again—but I warn you, should I do so——"

She took Colonel Labouchere's arm, and passed away.

Mrs. Talbot, first mortified, then hurt and angry, ended by being contemptuous.

"A low, intriguing girl. How she spoke according to her class! I should never have known them; and this is only what we expose ourselves to."

The party of four came home very

silent and even out of humour. The Beauty, because no one was inclined to talk and "rally" him on his successes; and old Dick Lumley, because he had been kept up late, had eaten something at supper, which he *now* knew would by-and-by disagree with him; and because he felt sore and broken. He looked very shattered, and "parting in pieces" in that ghastly daylight. Miss Phœbe's discomfiture spoke for itself; while in Mrs. Talbot there was rankling the sense of defeat in many ways. All these four were to remember that night well. But Mrs. Talbot, as she laid her refined head on the pillow, consoled herself—

"A low girl, whom I ought to have had nothing to do with!"

CHAPTER XII.

PROGRESS OF EVENTS.

Many months went by, droning on. No regiment had come to fill the place of the ——th; but the neighbours had plenty to talk of—victualled, as it were, for six months with gossip in details of Miss Hardman's rather hurried marriage at the Towers. It was considered a wonderful thing for the man of money. A fresh proof of shrewdness combined with wealth. "A long-headed fellow, Hardman; sure to do!" though in truth, as we have seen, he had nothing to do with the matter. Mere outsiders supposed he had given her a great fortune, forty or fifty thousand

pounds. But here was more of his shrewdness. Why should he do so? it would be gratuitous surplusage, would it not? The tone he took was this:

"Colonel Labouchere, sir, you do my family an honour; and you have won the affections of my daugher. Now I tell you frankly, she did not consult me, neither did you. Observe, I find no fault; but I merely make the statement. I may have my own ideas as to the part a father should play in these matters; but that is neither here nor there. You are a gentleman and a soldier, and of good family."

"Yes, Mr. Hardman," said the Colonel, quietly. "Well?"

"Well, it comes to this; I always intended to give my daughter eight thousand pounds. Had I chosen for her, I tell you frankly, it should have been *eight times eight* thousand; but now you must only

wait till my death. I can't help it, Colonel Labouchere. That's my way now."

"Mr. Hardman, you mistake me; it is really nothing to me. I have not thought of fortune; if I had, I tell you frankly, I could have done far better, as it is called."

A pang went through Mr. Hardman's heart. He had made a blunder; he might have given little or nothing. However, having taken this tone, he kept it up—a little wounded, yet not angry; aggrieved from *duty* merely, but full of goodwill to the pair. One of these days, he meant that his son should really "do" splendidly; for him he should bring a girl of title—a real, genuine, good thing, and with money, too,—none of your beggarly, hungry, fine people, "who bring nothing with them but a few gowns." He should go into the market, and take care to choose the goods himself. "See here, sir," he

said to his son, "you must look to what you are about. You have had a noble allowance, sir, from me; every whim of yours gratified, provided you spend your money in cultivating really nice well-born friends, whom it is a credit to know. I tell you, sir, you don't exert yourself; you don't push and cultivate people, and I am not going to be wasting my substance gratifying your low tastes. Why, another fellow with your means would hold up his head, and know half the peerage. Damn it, sir, I won't go on with this sort of thing for any helpless log like you."

"I can't help it, father," said the son, "it's not in my way. I haven't the art of it, and it appears to me so degrading. I can see they don't *want* us. Surely *you* see that yourself, father; money alone will not get us on."

His father glared at him. "You have the low drop in you, sir; a cur's blood; and, sir, don't preach to me. I had to put up with enough from your sister, in her day."

"I tell you, father, I have tried it, and it only brings me a cold air of insolence, which is intolerable. Let me make my friends in my own way, and I promise they shall be nice ones, and I am sure more useful than any of these people."

"I won't listen to this stuff," said his father, swelling and growing red; "it must all come to a point! You shall go my way, or I shan't go yours; and you may starve on your way if you like. I'll find people who will be glad to do what I want."

This was but a repetition of a scene that had often occurred and really meant nothing serious. The father was one of

those foolish men who prodigally waste all their engines of attack on some trivial occasion. A son after his heart would have been one who followed his own snobbish gospel of "the duke's coachman," and who laid himself out to get on in life: *i.e.*, to try to know lords and ladies, or the sons of distinguished persons. Should such a lad have written home to him from school, "My great friend and chum is young Pollard. He is 'an honourable' and his father is a lord, and please I want ten pounds; *he* showed us ten which his father sent him," the sum would have been despatched by return of post, and with exceeding pride. Friends would have been stopped that day in the street, and the letter taken out pompously. "My son is at Bagley, under Dr. Webber. He makes very nice friends—young Pollard, son of Lord Pollard, who was lord in

waiting." Had that son proposed an arrangement with his father, ten pounds down for every acquaintance thus made, with "refreshers," he would have gladly agreed. Had he brought home young Pollard on a visit during vacation, thus indirectly bringing his lordship in *rapport* with himself, he would have gladly paid a very handsome sum. For that lord must have acknowledged that kind hospitality, sent messages, perhaps written, hoped that they would see Mr. Hardman at Pollardstown next month, when they were having a few friends, &c. But what could be done with the dullard, for whose education he was paying at Bagley, and who did propose one vacation to bring back a friend—a country clergyman's son!

It was the same when the young man was put into the army. He showed incurably low tastes. The regiment had been

chosen expressly, for it held Robert Hodder, the Duke of Bullington's third son, the Honourable Algernon Dalkey, Lord Blackrock's eldest son, "people about the queen," a beautiful rich ground, well worth the gardening; and yet the fellow did nothing. That "set" kept together, and would be glad, Mr. Hardman well knew, to take up a young man with such a back. How rejoiced, how proud he would have been to receive a letter, "I am bringing down Hodder, and Dalkey, and three or four of their friends, on Monday, so have everything of the best; but I want cash sadly, and you must 'stump down' [or 'book up,' whatever was the correct slang] handsomely." Why, a cheque for £500 would have been under payment for such a blessing. In many a reverie in his gaudy baronial study, he saw himself receiving these fine young

nobles, graciously permitting their freedoms and eccentricities, abasing himself before them, fooling them to the top of their, or rather *his*, bent. But such could be only a dream, though he clung to its realization for a long time.

With rage and disappointment he found what a hopeless dull career his son was pursuing, who was turning out an utter failure; he was steady and "low," never would do anything. Once he was overwhelmed with mortification on being introduced to one of the regiment, son to the "people about the queen," and who told him, "O, he keeps a good deal to himself, you know, no one is more respected by the men." More respected by the men! What a character! And my Lord Robert Hodder, and young Dalkey? (Mr. Hardman was one of that class who always say "My lord this") "O, they don't

speak. He set Dalkey down before the whole mess for telling some queer story." This was the way he was served—was treated! Was there ever so unhappy a father, with a son and daughter so hopeless, helpless, idiotic, purposeless, and "low" in their tastes.

However, here was the daughter established in life, and fairly. It was something; the Laboucheres had a good name, and there was a remote lord, a little behind, seen through some misty clouds of relationship. This, however, furnished him with some lofty illustrations, and "my son-in-law Labouchere" was often introduced. Longhampton was the family seat of the misty lord, whom he called the head of the family, and through some agency he procured a photograph of that seat, and, suited with a gorgeous golden frame, it stood on the drawing-room

table supported on an easel, and not failing to catch the eye of every guest. Whether it did or no, he was certain to give his short lecture in the panorama manner. "That is Longhampton, the seat of my son-in-law Labouchere's family. One of the English show places, you know. They were to have gone there for the honeymoon; but the regiment was ordered away."

He gave dinners, it would seem, for the very purpose of exhibiting this distant son-in-law, who really figured more conspicuously at such banquets than if he had been there in the flesh. But having gone up to London, and after labour almost Herculean, having got within range of that lord himself, either at club, or party, and having made "my son-in-law Labouchere" introduce him, he found himself congealed and frozen up by the

treatment he experienced. No men are so liable to this sort of painful ague, under the variable and capricious temperature of aristocratic treament: none are so servile and timorous in their approach, so faltering in their address, or so easily repulsed. There is something indeed that invites, "repulse us, and trample on us, do." The truth was, the lord was one of the most refined of his class, full of a haughty exclusiveness, and had bitterly resented this alliance between one of his connections and a "trader." The stare he gave, the resentful expression in his face, that "this was a liberty," seemed to burn into the very marrow of the sensitive Mr. Hardman. The faltering invitation on his lips carefully conned, died away. "Our little place in the country, if your lordship would so far honour it. Near Longhampton, of course—of which a little picture stands on

our drawing-room table—it will seem a hovel."

"Colonel Labouchere? I know very little of his movements. Did you wish to speak to me about him?"

"O dear no! my lord, except, that is, he is now my relation, my son-in-law, I may call him—I thought——"

The lord shrugged his shoulders and turned away. Mr. Hardman tried a forlorn hope. "If you were coming down our way, my lord, at any time, I do trust you might honour our little place."

"Out of the question, much obliged to you," said his lordship, in a tone that meant as plainly "low intrusive fellow," as words would sound it. Then turned his back on the other.

Mr. Hardman saw amused faces at this rebuff; saw also the lord plainly describing the matter to a small group afar off; he

had the too quick instinct of pushing sensitiveness. He was, besides, one of those *gauche* men, who, when snubbed, exhibit the marks of it like a beating, and knew not how to withdraw himself. From that hour he could not forgive his daughter this mortification. On a character of this sort there is some satisfaction in dwelling thus minutely; the stores are inexhaustible, the clods of meanness turning up are fresh, and ever new. Character thus exhibited in various shapes and turnings is, in fact, story.

In this humour he was in no mood to be indulgent to his son, or to the family where the son was now visiting very frequently. Many were the delightful mornings the latter spent over in Miss Livy's company, and in that of her mother; for the young man, whose instinct was quickened by love, saw what was the daily and nightly

filial task of that daughter, and that if he must slowly draw himself into any appreciation, it must be by sympathy with what she was so steadily working out. The little drama that was being acted so perseveringly, by one of the actors at least, with such never-flagging labour, was for him a subject of wonder and admiration.

Accustomed to the selfishness of "men" at mess, and of men in army life generally, that utter unselfishness, that never-wearying and wakeful purpose, that organised deception that never slept, absolutely confounded him. After that, he could only lend his own small service, and do his best to aid the two women in what was the reasonable scheme of the one, and the pious one of the other. The routed Phœbe had retreated to her own dominions, and with elasticity, which is

the happy consolation of all such Cossack cavalry, would presently be preparing an attack on some other outpost.

Thus it was that the Beauty found himself of a sudden treated with a deference and a graciousness rarely accorded to him by men. There was ordinarily a tendency to be "free," to banter him, or indulge in exaggerated praises of his gifts, and of his accomplishments, which always left him uneasy and doubtful of their genuineness. This feeling would make him turn away fretfully, with a "you are always going on with some folly or nonsense! I wish you'd have a little more sense!" Nor was Dick Hardman's attention, or rather manner, founded on much more than an unconscious sympathy with the purpose of her he so admired. He was not inclined, as his father had discovered, to pay court to

any one; but the spectacle was so praiseworthy and interesting, that he was drawn unconsciously to take an earnest part in the little play. Very soon the Beauty was speaking of him with complacent approbation, as though *he* had found out that he was "a very nice, well-bred, pleasant fellow." And this criticism of good breeding and agreeability seemed based on the attention with which "He gave one smile," that plaintive ballad, was listened to and applauded.

There was a new lyric "on the stocks," not yet "got into shape," but which he was "composing," *i.e.*, sitting at the piano, his face turned to the ceiling, while his delicate lady's fingers, whitened carefully by art, spelled out a little accompaniment. The new effusion was to be "about one of the best things I have ever done; and I tell you what, I'll sing it the

next time we go to your house." To this new friend he imparted snatches of his old life, when he was going out among the countesses and young ladies. "I don't want to brag, Hardman," he said; "but with all the boasting of these men about me, I needn't be shy. If I were to show you letters that were written to me by certain ladies, with all the love, flattering things, and so forth, you *would* stare. These fellows, now, if a woman looks at them over her fan, or says a bit of nonsense, make such a fuss. Now I'm a married man, of course, and have done with all that. Though there are married men enough about us going in for foolish flirtation, quite forgetting that women don't one quarter mean all the folly they say. Bless you, I know pretty well what that sort of thing means, and what it is worth. I have had half-a-dozen of 'em

sitting round me at a time, saying things that would make a man blush; of course, it was all their fun. I took it at its worth. Not but that they really liked me. You know, I suppose, what they used to call me?"

Dick smiled. "Some of the donkeys thought themselves very funny in making a joke of it, and all that, in their low way. But I tell you the truth, I think it was much more of a compliment, and one that would never be paid to them, if they lived for a hundred years. I'd like to see Bolton, or long Napier, or Singleton pick up such a name. Not one of them, sir. It would be a different sort of name they would have got. You know I understood the world pretty well, and all that sort of thing: I served my apprenticeship under more advantages than most men; and because I live down here, in this out-

of-the-way place, because it suits me to do so, as a married man with a young child growing up," here young Hardman winced a little, "you don't suppose I have grown rusty, or out of date, or couldn't hold my own with the best of them, if I chose? God bless me, yes!"

In this sort of monologue the Beauty ran on. He delighted in this viewing of himself in the past, as a lovely and engaging figure; but it was under the reserve that it was a past he had quite finished with. So young Hardman took care to impress on him, thinking of the two women.

"O yes," he said, "once a man is married, of course these sort of attentions can have no interest for *him*. He would not care for them, in fact.

"O, plenty would care for them, and a

few would get them, too, if they wanted them, I assure you."

"O, but not the nice, refined, considerate husband, who has good sense. Why should he?" said young Hardman, rather anxiously. "If I were married, I should consider myself finished for ever and aye, with all that. I should be entering on a new life. And you, with so charming a person as Mrs. Talbot, a famous belle, that was more admired, as they told me—"

The Beauty smiled complacently. "Yes, she was at the top of them all, no one was so run after; but *I* cut them all out. It was a good deal talked of at the time, I can tell you; made a stir;" and thus the Beauty got back into his dreams again, looking fondly and sweetly to those old days of triumph—not, it must be owned, thinking of her, but of his

own *prestige*, in carrying off that rather Waning *Belle*, after no very warm competition. His own exquisite complacency thus helped the good work of that untiring lady and her daughter, and prevented him seeing the true state of things. It was happy, therefore, for all. It had gone on now so long, he had become quite accustomed to his lot, contented and "resigned," as some of his old sneering friends would say, or much as some one sentenced for "long terms" would gradually grow accustomed to prison life.

Mrs. Talbot did not relish these visits of the young man. She had still the same morbid feeling towards that house, and which seemed even to increase by dwelling on. Her retrospect took the shape of triumph, and she soothed herself by the notion of even a victory. "I drove her from the place. I drove her from the

place!" she said very often; and by that curious process well known to us, by dwelling on it frequently, and on its details, she became gradually all but convinced of this little delusion. And though her sweet daughter would not descend, even for the sacred purpose of her life, to any deceit, still, she too, from sheer sympathy, worked herself into a tranquil belief that the superior power of her mother, and the old charm, had become intolerable, unendurable, to that cold and free-tongued woman, and that she fairly turned and fled. In her favourite fashionable portrait attitude Mrs. Talbot sat, her still beautiful hand under her chin, in a delightful reverie, and thus soothing herself with the thought that the old charm was still left, and would be left. Still, though she thus disliked the whole family, "root and branch," her instinct showed her that

this young man was on her side of their party in the house. The same instinct told her that he was deeply in love with her daughter, and of this she warned her.

Livy laughed. "The idea, mamma! Love! why he is only a friend—just comes over here to amuse himself, and me."

"Well, that *is*, or used to be, love," said her mother. "But to marry into that dreadful family, that terrible man and woman always before you! my poor child, why you would die of it. Though, indeed, the worst is gone—we defeated *her*."

"I could not leave you, dearest," said her daughter, kissing her fondly. "No, never! No, nor dear Beauty. What would become of me without you both? Dick is very nice and good, and I have seen no one like him as yet. But the other is a different thing. We three are

so happy together, I could not endure thinking of a change. No, sweet, sweet mamma; that must never be!"

The graceful arms of the fine lady so admired in the portrait wound softly about her.

"What do you live for, darling? What is a girl's aim of life? No, dear; these are foolish notions. In time we shall think of what is suitable for you. *I* shall manage that, as I have managed so much. I wonder, dear"—and here she closed her eyes and smiled.—"if I were to go out of this weary world, would—your father marry again?"

The gentle girl's eyes lit, then she hid her colouring cheeks in her mother's neck.

"Don't speak so, dear; you must not. Such a thought! Our poor Beauty! he is so happy and good, and so content. There he is!"

And there floated up to them from below the sounds of the piano, and the sweet voice of the Beauty, who was "composing" one of his "little things."

"And how good he has been all this time—no running up to town by himself; no clubs even. It is wonderful, dearest, when we think of it."

Mrs. Talbot sighed a little wearily.

"Yes, but it has been weary work: so long, and never ceasing. It has been hard labour. But we may rest now, I think, my pet."

"Rest, dear. Poor Beauty! if he had been only left to himself all this time, you would have had no trouble. There are such unkind people. But he is so happy now."

The mother looked at her fondly, smoothing her hair languidly.

"Yes, I think we may think of you

now, dear. I must turn my thoughts to you. No, we could not send you into that lion's den—that low, coarse, manufacturing mother-in-law would make you pine away. You would die, dear, in that vulgar Brummagem prison. Ah! what would you say to my Cousin Robert, who is coming on Monday—a rising man, as they call it, certain to be an under-secretary, shrewd and careful? I know I could make him do a good deal. He was in love with me when he was a boy and I a young lady."

"No! no! no! mamma," she repeated. "You, I, and Beauty! we were made for each other. Let Lord Robert be under-secretary, or what he likes."

"We must ask these vulgar people, for we are in debt to them; and must pay, or they will sue us before the parish. It will amuse us, though. I know he will

be grovelling before Robert. I wish some one else was coming, though; a little battle and victory is so exciting."

"She has had enough dearest; and will keep the seas between her and you, if she can."

Now the voice of the Beauty was heard in peevish tones, demanding some one to aid him at the piano, and some one also to stimulate him with applause, and say, "How original! How pretty!"

He affected on these occasions to hear the effect of what he had "composed," as it were, for the first time, and to be pleased or displeased. He would remodel, or let it stand. So Mrs. Talbot herself went down—her toilette being correct, gauzy and floating—to undertake the office, and was kept for an hour and more receiving directions and corrections in her performance of the amateur and illegal harmonies

which he had written, being herself made responsible for their defects. He was not very well pleased with the result; she was not as enthusiastic as she ought to have been, and he was out of humour. However, the reserve came up in the shape of his daughter, whose warm and genuine praises restored the day.

CHAPTER XIII.

"MR. AND MRS. TALBOT REQUEST THE HONOR."

When a delicate little note, with a delicate and refined monogram—the Hardmans had a monogram all ablaze with the lettering of a City shop-board, gold and colours, and a perfect *tangle* of gorgeous characters—was brought to the owner of "The Towers," he read it with great complacency. "Very proper! Very suitable!" He was pleased because he saw, from the formal character of the invitation, it was to be none of the dull, domestic affairs which they professed to like, *sans cérémonie*, and to consider far more pleasant than the great, dull, state dinners.

This was a very poor, low view to take; and, for aristocratic people, a most singular one. A state dinner, twenty-four or eighteen strong, was to him the perfection of elegance, civilization, and refinement. There true happiness and enjoyment was to be found, if you had been "given" some well-born person to take down. He had been afraid that the return compliment would have taken the shape of one of the foolish solemnities which he so dreaded; but he knew now they were certain of a choice culling of two or three flowers of rank, which was what the Talbots affected when they wished to be in state. There was more opportunity here, and he delightedly sent an acceptance, on the monogramed paper, which seemed like a bad imitation of some old MS. illumination, and which he sometimes boasted cost him sixpence a sheet.

The great coach of state had set them down—Mr. and Mrs. Hardman and their son—and they had entered in the usual single file. Mr. Hardman coming last, a little uneasy and hot, into that refined atmosphere, where all was elegant and subdued beside the hot glare of his own decoration, saw that there was a grey, large-headed gentleman with his wife, a young man with a beard, who was at home, and Old Dick Lumley over again.

He felt assured that these were "somebodies," though the society was scarcely of sufficiently flattering dimensions to suit him. He and his party seemed, indeed, both to themselves and every one else, utterly out of place. They were out of keeping and did not match. The resplendent Joss, the huge mass of human flesh, stuck over with gold and diamonds,

and set upon cushions, was the worst. Mr. Hardman—keeping back—hung uneasily on the outskirts. He wondered at the vast quantity the others had to say. How little they minded *him!* The round-headed gentleman proved to be Mr. Rawlinson, one of the Foreign Office secretaries, an important person, who knew every particular most valuable to know. The other was the Lord Robert, Mrs. Talbot's relation, a good-looking, bearded fellow, who was credited with an amount of wisdom vastly beyond his years, and, it must be said, still more vastly beyond what he really possessed, but which he utilized and put out to interest in a manner that was the envy of many. He had that admirable gift, which is the pride and despair of stupid people, of appearing to be full of things to tell, or to comment on, and which from such a person acquires

an extra value and importance. He was not afraid of his own voice.

Mr. Hardman hovered uneasily on the outskirts, smiling as if he understood, his hands behind him. Even when Old Dick Lumley and the Foreign Office secretary and Mrs. Talbot were all in a tumult of talk and excitement, laughing, clattering, interrupting, he was still outside the enclosure, and every one knew that he was. He knew that they knew this. Mrs. Talbot directed her husband to introduce him, compassionating his situation, and he was relieved at finding himself bowing humbly to a Lord Robert —something that he could not catch. Henceforth through the night it was, "You were saying, Lord Robert"—"As Lord Robert remarked"—"*Your* view, Lord Robert;" and that young man, strange to say, known to be full of what

is called "chaff," was strangely deferential to him. But Bob was known to be "deuced long-headed"—"never to let go a chance"—and a few whispers from his relation that this was a shrewd, vulgar, clever man of business, who had made himself, and could help a man, may be supposed to have much to do with it.

The little dinner was delightful. The sauce about that round table was a never-flagging vivacity and good spirits, worth all the dishes in Francatelli. Old Dick Lumley, at such banquets, drank out of his first glass some of the precious fountain of youth—just enough, at least, to carry him through the dinner. How his ancient jaws moved in both directions; how the stories and commentaries poured out, and the choice wines poured in! The ruined teeth played on their restored fellows underneath, and the wonderful

vital strength which was within that old man of society gave light to his eyes, colour to his cheeks, inflexion to his voice, gesture to his arms. Mr. Rawlinson, without revealing secrets, gave curious little details of his office, which showed that he was intimate with ministers,—little points that could not be found in the newspapers.

"Lord Manley came down himself four times during the day to see that the despatches were ready. I never saw a man so nervous. Of course I knew what the office could do, and guaranteed him that all would be in time; but I give you my honour, at eight o'clock, just as other people were going to their dinner, down he drove again in his brougham. Most remarkable man, that. Must see everything done himself."

He had no such devoted listener as Mr.

Hardman, who bent his thin chest across the table to catch every word. It was impossible to ignore such a listener; and when Mr. Hardman repeated that it was wonderful, astounding — "What, in his own brougham?" — that he had never heard anything to approach it in all his life, the narrator was naturally impressed. Old Dick Lumley capped it with another trait.

"Just like him. He came in the other morning to one of Milkton Monsey's breakfasts, and made such a fuss about his egg being boiled properly; I never knew anything like it. It was too hard, too soft, a shade less, a shade more: and this man with a portfolio! Very curious!"

"Lord bless you," said the Lord Robert, impetuously, and putting them all down together, "there's nothing in that. That's part of the game. One of

the best actors going. I know it as a fact that *he hates eggs.*"

Mr. Hardman was outside the whole—kept away by a scrub fence and wall, over which he could only smile adhesion. He knew nothing of Manley, nor of the crowd of people who were made to pass across that dinner-table. Even when some one or something that he did know turned up, he could not get in any contribution. He was like a log on the neck of the party; that dead weight of the two seemed to press on all, and eyes of distrust were bent on them. Mr. Hardman was very uncomfortable; Mrs. Hardman found a refuge in steady eating. At last a soldier's name was mentioned, who was in a regiment out at Gibraltar. Here was a conversational hen-coop flung to him, and the Beauty put in for him.

"Oh, you ought to know something

about that. Isn't that Labouchere's regiment?"

"Yes, my son-in-law," answered the other, with an indescribable pomposity, which he did his best to avoid. "He commands it—commands the regiment."

"Very good fellow, Labouchere," the young Lord Robert said, in a patronising way. "Keeps his men rather stiff, but a good officer."

"You know him, then, Lord Robert?" Mr. Hardman said, with delight and importance mixed.

"Know him! To be sure—all my life. He has his faults, as every man has; but there is a tone of chivalry about him—old fashion, plenty would call it—which I like. That's a thing you can't get in the shops now. So he is married?"

"Yes, Lord Robert. He holds quite a distinguished position out there, such as

we have no idea of here. The governor can do nothing without him."

The young man laughed boisterously.

"What, old Fazakerly? *He* never *could* do anything without somebody. Ha, ha! Yes, Labouchere would shine out there. And near old Lady Fazakerly, Mrs. Labouchere—whom I've not had the honour of knowing as yet—would shine without much exertion. Poor old Tow-Row Faz! She was high comedy, or rather farce."

The Beauty struck in complacently,

"Oh, Mrs. Labouchere, I can tell you, will come out brilliantly wherever she is. She will have quite a court of her own there. In fact, certain to be queen wherever she is."

At this praise, uneasiness came in the faces of the company, so marked, that the gay young man looked at them with a little surprise.

But the Beauty, who was in high satisfaction with himself, went on to Mr. Hardman,—

"Yes, she will be greatly admired, you know; for she has a style about her you don't see in most women."

Again fresh pain in the two faces; Mrs. Talbot talking away rather nervously to Old Dick Lumley.

"Sir," says Mr. Hardman, as if he was returning thanks at a public dinner, "I am sure Mrs. Labouchere, if she knew of your kind opinion, would feel it very much. Yes, she has a great deal of cleverness, and tact above all things, with a surprising knowledge of the world. You know *that*, Mrs. Talbot."

Mrs. Talbot's lip curled.

"I believe Mrs. Labouchere to be clever —very clever, from the slight acquaintance I had with her; but tact is so rare

a virtue, and I am sure she has so many others—"

"To be sure," the young man said; "you are right there. Not one man in fifty has tact; and, certainly, not one woman in two hundred."

Mr. Hardman at once gave up his daughter.

"Yes, Lord Robert, there is a great deal of truth in what you say." In a lower voice he went on, to Mrs. Talbot, "She is peculiar in some things, my daughter Rose. She takes things into her head, and at times was quite too fond of her own way. Really I was quite sorry to hear, Mrs. Talbot, that one evening, at our house, she had been rather—you know—to you, and—"

"Rather I know, to me!" repeated Mrs. Talbot. "What sort of behaviour was that, pray?"

"I mean" (growing red), "that she said some things—if I had been there, I assure you—"

Mrs. Talbot drew herself up.

"I must assure you that you are under some delusion. In the houses that I have been in the habit of going to, no one speaks to me in the way you describe. I scarcely know Mrs. Labouchere."

"No, no; I don't mean that," he said in great alarm. "But she is hasty, you know; and I have great difficulty myself at home—"

"Possibly. I never enter into the domestic life; it would be far too complicated a matter. I must beg you will not be under that strange impression any longer."

"Dear me, no, Mrs. Talbot. I really never dreamt of it a moment."

Then the pleasant medley of general

talk set in briskly. Dick Lumley had a choice morsel or so of something which it would be ungenerous to call scandal, and still of so curious and delicate a flavour that a child might almost taste of it. Cooked in this way, and by a *cordon bleu* who knows his work, nothing is so interesting; and we can see even the professional *devote ex officio*, the serious one, raising her demure eyes with interest. Old Dick Lumley was an artist at this work, and the sauce in which he served such morsels was a kind of deep *sympathy*, conveying that it was with deep pain that he entered on the matter at all.

"Such a sad business, that! Baker, who used to dine there twice a week, told me that the poor, gentle husband used to force money on him. When he came home from the club it was like that mountebank in the play, *Belphegor*—wife's

lace shawl on the chair. Five children left behind, I'm told. Shocking! What is to become of the poor things?"

"Two, I heard," said Lord Robert.

"Yes. Rest were at school. I have it all from Baker."

Even our Livy listened to this story with "tearful sympathy."

After dinner Mr. Hardman came more to the front, helped by the young Lord Robert, who now asked about Bidgood, the financial gentleman.

"I suspect you know him, Mr. Hardman, through and through? I am sure you do."

Instantly Mr. Hardman became, as it were, seated in his study chair, his hand rested under his waistcoat, and he sipped his claret with importance.

"You could not have come to anyone who knows more about Bidgood. I have

known him since he began, when he sat at a desk, great man as he is now."

"More power to him, as the Irish say," said Old Dick Lumley, cheerfully.

"See here, Lord Robert, I may know this thing and that, or I may not. A man in my position, and with my opportunities, is bound to be careful in what he says. We must be guarded; you understand. But I can put it this way. If I had ten thousand pounds to invest in a strictly sound though not showy security, Bidgood is not the man I would go to, or even consult."

"Neither would Bidgood be the man to whom you would write, enclosing cheque to that amount, leaving it to his discretion?" said the young man, with a loud laugh.

"Uncommonly good — O, very good. You put it, Lord Robert, far more

forcibly than I should dream of doing. Yes. I must own, as to the cheque, I think I should prefer my own broker."

When the gentlemen came up, Lord Robert and Mr. Hardman were seen, in a corner close to the door, busy in council. The latter, in a flush of intimacy, was, with slow gesticulation, impressing some information on his companion—warning, hinting, something with excessive knowingness; the other, listening with coyness, and yet with wariness. Mr. Hardman was, no doubt, "putting him up to a thing or two" in his own department, with many a familiar—

"Now, my dear Lord Robert! See here, Lord Robert; just take a hint from me. Don't trust Bidgood an inch farther than you can see—not an inch!"

Mrs. Talbot sat back in the empress-like attitude of her picture, and with

much scorn was talking to Old Dick Lumley, standing before her in a young man's attitude, of one of the few subjects that could rouse her into excitement. "You saw her," she was saying, and she spoke to Old Dick Lumley as confidentially as she might to a favourite maid; "and what she was; a forward, self-sufficient person in the worst style and manner — with that hard tone of mind which women of her class take for well-bred repose. Her style, she must have picked up from the accountants in her father's offices — a sort of pertness and flippancy. She was good enough to honour me with a sort of challenge, in her own house, which I reluctantly accepted, and gave her a setting down, which I believe she will remember. I saw some time ago that she was a drawback to our

neighbourhood, and that she must leave it, and—she has left it."

"A fine girl, though," said Mr. Lumley, "and, I should say, would suit Labouchere well."

"Suit him well!" she repeated, with infinite scorn. "Don't you know that he is a gentleman! I confess I enjoyed it all. It brought back my old days, when I could use my *pattes de velours*."

"I think," said Old Dick, with a knowing look, "she was even trying to keep her hand in with our friend, the Beauty. I give you my honour, I heard her praising his singing, fixing her big eyes on him in a searching way."

Mrs. Talbot changed her position with a noisy start. "It is really amusing," she said; "but I have no doubt you are right. I should not have been surprised, she would have ventured on something of

the kind; just her vulgar conception of something that might annoy. It was not worth rousing oneself; but I did so, and she has taken a lesson with her to the colonies which she did not much like, and will not soon forget."

"Hallo, what's this?" said Old Dick Lumley, growing a little fatigued with this talk, which had little interest for him. "See, is not that like our friend? You remember the doctor in the novel who paid a man to call him out of church?"

A servant had come in and handed Mr. Hardman a telegram. That gentleman made it into a sort of ministerial dispatch, as though it came from some cabinet, at the same time surveying it leisurely, taking his gold glasses out, as though these irregular communications were ordinary enough in his case. But before he had read a line or two he gave a

genuine start, with a "God bless me!" which drew the attention of all in the little room. "Very awkward! very sudden!" he murmured; then putting the paper into his new friend's hand, left the room. The eager Dick Lumley was looking over his shoulder in a moment, and reading the following:—

"*Gibraltar.*

"Colonel Labouchere died this morning, suddenly. Mrs. Labouchere sails by the next packet. I will do all that is necessary. If you have any directions, telegraph at once."

It was from the major of the regiment, the fortunate officer who now succeeded "without purchase." Dick Lumley, with great presence of mind, said aloud, "O ah! a business thing!" not from any compassion for the wife; but simply in homage to the decencies of the little

party, and the fuss and discomfort it would cause him personally. Mrs. Talbot alone was disquieted, and it was with something like malice, but of which he was unconscious, that he told her. "It seems that poor Labouchere is dead, and the widow coming over by the next packet."

"Coming over!" she repeated, starting up. "Coming back here!"

Mr. Hardman re-entered; he had been himself to see about the duke's coachman, and also the messenger. He returned with a mysterious importance. He was, at all events, now the centre figure. Telegrams, dispatches, brought in, always impart a factitious dignity, or, at least, an air of fuss. He bade his wife come away, wrung Lord Robert by the hand affectionately. "I shall not forget," he said, "depend on me, and if you want

advice on any point, command me. This blow will interfere for a time, and, indeed, I was hoping we would have had you over few days at 'The Towers.' But by-and-by, by-and-by!" Mr. Hardman threw a plaintiveness in his voice, as though he were now crushed, and the wind *might* be tempered to such a shorn lamb as he was. Then they drove away.

The party remained laughing and chatting, and Old Lumley quite excelled in his cheerful touchings and recollections of the pompously bereaved gentleman. Lord Robert was specially merry on "my son-in-law Labouchere," and with a social disloyalty which is not at all uncommon, presented a series of comic etchings of the absent guest, more creditable to his memory than to his gratitude. This, indeed, is always the most tempting and irresistible season for another renewed party; the

sense of relief from stiffness, with a joyous *laissez faire* sets in, and a guest with some gifts must be of more than early Christian asceticism who can resist such a tempting opportunity. Every one stretches his arms and breathes freely; the buckram has passed away; here are a few precious minutes, we are all happy, and so—a live animal is sacrificed. So it was with Mr. Hardman; and while the duke's coachman was driving his great horses homeward at a pace that suited himself, the little cheerful circle was laughing in intense enjoyment at the competing histrionics of Old Dick Lumley and young Lord Robert—all, save Mrs. Talbot, who sat in her Chalon attitude, reflecting, and with a distrustful and disquieted face.

END OF VOL. I.

BEAUTY TALBOT.

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

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BEAUTY TALBOT.

CHAPTER I.

AN INVITATION.

For the miniature household there was still the same tranquil existence. It might have been almost called domestic,—the very essence of domestic. And yet this effect might seem strange, with such mundane elements as a veteran belle, (veteran in the sense of one who has served her ten years), and an Exquisite who has sold out of that regiment prematurely, and thinks he has made a mistake. But there was in the household one binding and purifying element, the watchful, loving daughter,

whose very labour and energy and application that never tired or slept, performed miraculous prodigies, as it always will do. The strange charm of that earnestness and affection, seen to be so utterly unselfish, never failed, or, rather, was increasing in power every day. The fragile soul of Beauty Talbot would have been helpless before even a weaker mind: and he was, in truth, being kept like some of those youths, brought up in fairy valleys, jealously guarded from the knowledge of men and women and the world, an attempt which even in the fairy tales, alas! invariably broke down!

Even had the mind of her father been nourishing any thoughts of enfranchisement, any longing looks backwards towards the fairy gardens he had been taken from, he was soon to see what difficulties

there were in the way of his emancipation. He was kept in by a succession of barriers of soft wood and moss, endless in number, and likely to take up too much time and trouble to break through. Thus the task of education went on; a drive three times a week, and the greater expedition to town from Pengley Station, and the solemn dinner-party at distant gorgeous palaces, whither the whole party set out in grand *tenue*, and returned more or less prostrated—but still having done their duty, as the country expects every man and woman to do. Then there was the working together, and the lighting of the lamp, with the applause for the Beauty's last composition, and the reading out by Livy of novel or poem, the former carefully selected, as illustrating him and his wife. This was in the hands of this

gentle schoolmistress, their daughter. They had their round of duties and little pleasures. She read to them, *him* rather, and amused him, was ever watchful and ready at a moment to dart in to the place when any of his squad of entertainers flagged or dropped down in the ranks. The round of life became as regular as that of an institution. There was the little box of a place and its green garden and flowers, there was the walk after breakfast, and the walk after lunch, there was the village and the town, with the young happy husbands and happy circles, men who ambled round the domestic circus with a contented monotony.

Sometimes she read out even such a work as one of Mr. Froude's romances, and her voice was so steady and musical that she imparted to the rather dry pro-

ceedings of King Harry and Queen Mary, glimpses of interest; though at times the Beauty flagged, and yawned, and wandered to the piano to embody "a thought" by way of relief. He became rather proud of his historical knowledge thus refreshed, and thus administered—he could never have tackled the volumes themselves—and rather bewildered some of his friends whom he favoured with scraps, and made them ask what on earth was Beauty putting such things into his well oiled head for. The effect of all was discipline, and the Beauty felt that in this little house, and in these little tranquil pursuits life would go on always, and he would grow full, and stout, and heavy, and old, while the old charms and attractions were to become smaller and dimmer, and more uninteresting, as their little waggonette

rolled easily down the hill. Livy, the genius of the household, might now halt. Her work was almost done.

The people about Pengley naturally fancied that the news of the death of his son-in-law would take down Mr. Hardman's airs a little. But, in truth, he was not at all displeased "at the turn matters had taken," his own phrase. In the first place, he missed—and woefully missed—the invaluable aid of his daughter, though not for a moment would he acknowledge such a thing, even to himself. In his social advances he found himself of a sudden as powerless as the boy from whom Sir Walter Scott cut off the button. She had taken herself off, as he put it, and had thrown all the duties of the place on his poor back. How could he find time to be going to see ladies? As for her—Mrs.

Hardman—as well might he put one of the sirloins hanging in Stubber's shop in the carriage, and tell it to go paying visits. Selfishly she had taken care of herself, and left him there to manage as he could. The relations, too, of the deceased Colonel had behaved in execrable taste. They had been cold and "stand-off." It had been conveyed to him that they did not approve nor disapprove the connection. This he laid entirely to the account of his daughter, who "had no knowledge of the world," and, at her age, was still as helpless as a child. Indeed, when he came calmly to consider the alliance—the brilliant smoke having cleared away with the petards of the wedding, &c.—he found it was a poor and profitless business enough. "He took nothing by it but expense."

Still, on this sudden demise of his son-

in-law, it was wonderful the large amount of discount that he got out of the transaction. His favourite and often-quoted domestic sank into the second place, beside the "death of my son-in-law," the "great blow we have all sustained," &c. The worst was, the very nature of the distinction cut him off from all public opportunity of celebrating it. He could not dine out, or have people to dine; and yet without these occasions how was he to impress on the public the loss he had sustained? He might pay visits, but that would be scarcely decent; and very few came to visit him. Still he could make his servants exhibit the most poignant and conspicuous grief; and the London tailor fitted Miller, who had driven the Duke, with an inky garment, that seemed to shine and reflect all things with the

glassiness of a deep well, and hung about with festoons and hawsers of sepulchral cordage. But the quiet contempt of the wearer, his sarcastic smile as he appeared in these sables, was a perfect protest, and undid the whole effect.

If Mr. Hardman could have set up a hatchment on the face of his house, he would have done so; but even the undertaker, whom he consulted, said they could scarcely go so far as that. He would not even have objected to the expense and trouble of "bringing the body over," and some faint notion crossed his mind of consulting the late Colonel's noble relations on the matter; but he shrank from the cold snubbing which he had instinct enough to perceive would be in store for him.

Of the "bereaved widow," as he de-

lighted in styling her—"my daughter, Mrs. Labouchere, her husband carried off suddenly—a most unfortunate business, sir,"—he, strange to say, heard little. She barely deigned to communicate her movements to him. She went to a small French port by herself and remained there. Those who saw her privately—and there was no better judge than her maid that had "gone out" and returned with her—bore testimony to her strong grief and desolation after the husband she had lost. With all the hard crystallization that had grown round her heart in that household—the damp, unwholesome, graveyard fungi, which had so unhealthily crept over her soul in defiance of her struggles—she had learned to appreciate the honest, elderly devotion of the man who had chosen her; and his death had been a great shock.

Their past life had been pleasant, though disturbed by a few storms; but it was when he was gone that she discovered that she could, as time went on, have been supremely happy with him, had fate allowed; and this deprivation she somehow associated with those who had thwarted and mortified her. As her liking for him grew and opened, she seemed to hold the idea that something was "between them"—that those who disliked her had inspired him with the idea that she was not his equal in rank and refinement—a something which, if removed, their happiness would have been great. On his death-bed he thanked her in his chivalrous, high-bred way.

"If I had lived, dearest," he said, "I could have shown you what I thought of the great honour you did me; and if

I had been allowed to live, I would have tried to prove it: still you have been the best of wives, and if I had had time I would have understood you better. A good deal," he added, with his soft, good-natured smile, "was done to prevent me from understanding you—indeed, to keep me from you for ever; but, thank God, that did not succeed. I never believed that story, dearest, though ample proof was offered."

"What they said about what took place in Ireland—"

"Not a word of it! not a word! Not if they had sent me a dozen more letters. I tore them up, and never read beyond the line where their calumny began."

"I know that. I believe it. Oh, if we had but time, the best refutation would be my life, and the love it would show

for you. I could tell you her name who wrote these falsehoods to you."

"Ah, women!" he said, smiling; "they catch at all weapons in these cases; and they are not so much to blame. It would be different with them. But you will know this, dearest: they had no effect on me."

"What, not in those first days when you possibly neglected me and looked down on us; and *that woman's* insidious hints and stories never came back to you; that loving a low rich man's daughter? You were too noble, dearest husband, to be conscious of it; but that was working in you—that was her work—and, oh, if I but live, if I but get back to England—"

She spoke so sternly, coldly, and solemnly, that he half raised himself on his elbow to look at her.

"What woman? Who is this?"

She saw the dangerous colour mounting on his cheek, and quietly floated the subject away, as one might a log in the water. Long months after it came drifting up to her as she stood by the strand. She had been expecting it wistfully, anxiously. What had restrained her was the rigorous decencies of widowhood. She must be sorrowful, *secundum artem*, before she could think of other things. That dismal quarantine of mourning must be put in, else she dare not mingle with her kind. Six, seven, eight months went by. *Then* surely she might "divert her thoughts." Then people began to tell her it was "a duty to make an exertion." She had another duty to her father; she would go to him, who was glad now to welcome "an honourable daughter," like

the wicked Sir Giles of the play. She would be a glory and an ornament for his household, like that Order of Merit "the duke's coachman." She was coming at an awkward time, for "he was going to Bindley."

At last; for the first invitation had gone off like the misfire of a pistol. The lord had met with a severe domestic affliction, which obliged him to put off his party. Such a blow had not fallen on the low rich man in his life. It kept him awake for two or three nights—a malady about as unknown to him as tears; it made him fume and rage like a madman. The affliction being now happily softened, the invitation was renewed. The lord had clearly conveyed his wishes,—which Mr. Hardman was not slow to understand—that Mrs. Hardman should not attend the

solemnities, though he had complied with the forms of society by seeming to press her to attend. This she herself understood.

Livy and her mother, floating down the pleasant but humdrum stream of their domestic life, were talking together one morning in that pleasant unanimity which made it almost like the musings of a single mind. There was the one usual subject, the Beauty: "how good he was getting; how happy their life was and would be now! Indeed, there was now the long-promised, long-talked of foreign tour—a charming and happy trio going to see palaces and gardens and delightful towns, dining together at cafés, supping, sitting in the gardens, listening to the music. They might, indeed, now have a holiday, and a handsome sum had been put by for the trip. It was in honour of

Mrs. Talbot's birthday. "Indeed, dear," says Livy, as if to her sister, "indeed, Beauty deserves it. It is wonderful, his self-denial, and goodness, and content with his life here. There is something noble in it, dear, is it not?"

Livy would scarcely have made this statement on affidavit, but she wished to impress her mother, who smiled.

"Yes, dear; but it has cost us a deal of pains. However, we have got our pretty yacht in to port, dear, and may now enjoy ourselves on shore."

At that moment the yacht itself sailed in, the Beauty holding an open letter in his hand.

"Very nice, indeed, and very kind of them. A letter from the Bindleys. They have not forgotten me, you see."

"What, Lord Bindley, Beauty dear? An invitation?"

"Yes. Many and many were the delightful weeks I spent there! Some of the happiest days, and, by Jove! they made so much of me;" and he kept looking wistfully at the letter. "But that's all over now!"

"All over now? No, dear Beauty; why should you think that?"

"Oh, there's such a fuss and pother made, as if a man couldn't put a few things into a portmanteau, and go and shoot a few birds at a friend's house. They all do it. There's Magnay, with his six children, he's away half the year. There's Thomas, and a heap more. But *I* can't go without a fuss being made. It's very unfair."

He went out, and it was assumed that his last statement was quite correct; *i.e.*

that he could not go without a fuss being made—in fact, could not go at all. But the gentle Livy, with brightening eyes, looked up at her mother.

"Poor Beauty! he deserves a holiday; he's been *so* good, and he seems to have set his heart on this. He used to like shooting so."

"Go without *me*, dear—without his wife or daughter? It is quite unusual."

"Only for a few days," pleaded his daughter. "*Think*, dear; it is pushing it too far. After all, as he says, other gentlemen do it, even the one with six children."

"You don't know him, dear; you can't know what men are."

"And after all, it is only three or four hours from here, so we can have him back at once, if you want him. He need only

stay three or four days. Oh, let him go, do; and we shall have him back in time for your birthday."

The mother smiled. The Beauty, who had indeed given up his scheme as hopeless, was agreeably surprised to be told that he was given furlough. Not that he admitted that any one had power to prevent him; but he knew that so many difficulties would be thrown in his way as to make the expedition impossible. He could hardly believe his ears. More wonderful still, he was to go alone. Not that he allowed to himself for a moment that any one in that house had power to restrain his movements; but he had fallen so insensibly under the inflexible rules of the house——

That day, then, to his amazement, he found that no objection was made to the little scheme; on the contrary, there was

a universal enjoyment and delight through the house, as though a legacy had been left, or Papa or Tom was coming home. For with unselfish mothers, faithful worshippers of their lordly king of brutes—oftener the brute himself—this cheap pleasure comes the most welcome. He was delighted—was like a boy sent home for a few days. He was the whole morning over his gun. It would be dull enough but for that pastime—"Only a lot of men herded together." "Never mind," said the two ladies; "dear Beauty must try to enjoy himself." There was then Mrs. Talbot's birthday drawing on; he was to be home for that. And within a couple of days he had gone away triumphant and happy, leaving them complacently happy also. And he was to be back, positively, in three days—by Saturday.

CHAPTER II.

FESTIVITIES AT BINDLEY.

At Bindley, Lord and Lady Bindley were entertaining a distinguished circle of guests; though there was not at any period of the visit a circle; for the house was vast and rambling, and the guests were nearly always scattered. Neither were these latter "distinguished;" for they included a great many of those curiously obscure persons and people who are somehow necessary to the great and noble. "Hangers-on" would be too familiar a term; jackals would be offensive; and yet some such office they do

fill. They are generally people of slender means, possibly of obscure birth, though that is not inquired into; but they are infinitely useful, work hard, and when not on the ground, which happens once or twice, make their absence felt.

Thus at Bindley there filled these offices "the Woods," wife and husband; she a bustling lady's-maid sort of woman, with a sharp manner; he a bushy yellow-whiskered man, who had got to know every one, who arranged everything at Bindley. Again, there were two Malcolm girls, who were fetched from some distance, and came with their aunt, and were believed to be a half-pay officer's daughters; and there was Mr. Bolton, who came from some strange garret about St. James's, but who pastured and browsed all the year round on the rich

commons and lawns of "noblemen and gentlemen." No one asked who *he* was. He had a grave and quiet sufficiency which carried him through, an assertion that seemed to repel inquiry, an air and carriage that is worth hundred pound notes. Cork-like, this gentleman always floated up to the surface among the best. How he lived no one knew, but he was always at the best houses. When Bindley, therefore, and other places, opened their gates for a fortnight's official visiting, all these useful supernumeraries received notice, much as a stage-manager would send round to his subjects. Indeed it was more like some of those amateur orchestral societies where, though amateurs constitute the body, a sprinkling of professionals is necessary to make "the thing go." These were the professionals who came

to "dear Lord Bindley's" regularly; but besides these there came the regular guests, who arrived with all honours, and whom the others contributed to entertain.

Such were the colourless (morally speaking) ladies of true breeding and refinement, the Countess Seaman, and her two daughters, the Ladies Mary and Alice Mariner—elegant, tranquil, and trained; Mr. Bulfin, the Member; the Lord Robert we met before, who turned up later, and all but invited himself, but they were delighted to have him; Mr. Talbot, and Mr. Hardman.

Bindley was a stone fortress-like building, rising bluntly in a fine park. There were noble trees, ponds, and a few deer seen skipping away coquettishly as the frequent carriage came rolling up the

avenue, smooth as a skater, on the outside. There was a "grand hall," "restored" cleverly—*i.e.*, rebuilt—by Inigo Robinson, the well-known fashionable architect—a "gentleman," be it understood, and not a professional man; and the house was "mounted" in the best taste, as indeed it might be said, without intention of jest, the guests were. The stables were a show in themselves; and grim visitors, intending to be sarcastic, used to wish they were horses. Everybody was brought "to see the stables," even unequine visitors; and there is nothing to the untechnical eye less likely to impress. In the house was the usual staff, high-sounding names,—groom of the chambers, and the like.

This was the first night of the festival, and though nearly the whole company

had then arrived, it was like the first day's voyage out on board a steamer; no one had settled or shaken down into their places, and all were looking at each other askance.

The inauguration dinner was over. Lord Bindley had sat on his throne, with Louisa Mary, Countess Seaman, at his side,—a tall and vast lady, with an impassive and monumental face, trained to show neither joy nor sorrow, and yet by some arrangement of her hair suggesting the crest of a cockatoo. Her daughters had camped lower down. The supernumeraries had arrived early, had got out their properties and dresses, and were working hard already. They had all come up, or rather come in, to the "noble" drawing-room at Bindley, which, as picnic parties know, is on the ground

floor, and with its eight great windows gives upon the lawn. The lamps are lit, balls of powder are bent over tea-cups, the new orange liveries are on, and Wood and wife are spurring about like mounted orderlies. Every instant they are beside the noble host and hostess making a suggestion:

"I think, my lord, if Miss Georgina Malcolm were to sing now." "Ah, very good idea, Wood. My lady will go and ask her." Or Mrs. Wood draws rein beside the hostess. She thinks "If they got the two old gentlemen down to whist, Mrs. Toft and Miss Toft would make up the party." Lady Bindley smiles approbation; a very good idea. "Don't know what they should do without the Woods?" They have no ideas their own property, and think this

rather cheap faculty of "hitting on ideas" perfectly wonderful.

Mr. Bolton was present, browsing quietly off Mr. Bulfin, the Member, and the Lord Robert. Bolton knew nothing of the topics kindred to these gentlemen, yet with that valuable, weighty manner of his, contrived that both should be listening to him with a deference and a delusion that they were receiving real information from a man well up in the subjects. Yet on analysis his information resolved itself into the quotation of aristocratic authority. "When I was at Plympton last year the French minister was there, and he said," &c.; or, with grave correction across the table, "I think you are misinformed. Clumper himself told me the whole story, and complained bitterly of the man;" "Clumper" being

the Viscount with that title. Yet he had an admirable gift, for these noble names were introduced, not with constraint and even tremor, but with a calm steadiness that was admirable.

The Malcolm girls were not "put on," but were wisely kept in hand, so as not to exhaust all the attraction. They were in reserve, as it were. By and by all would see.

A delightful night for the Beauty. It seemed like a dream, or rather as if he was awake again, and all between had been a dream. The dressing-table upstairs was covered with the silver-backed brushes, now again on their travels, with the essences, silver boxes, and general display of Truefittism. *That* was like the old days. Here he was himself, beautiful to look at. Such linen, such

hair, such rings. He was like the morning star, and he was so happy. The old little utterances came back uninvited; congealed, as it were, like the Munchausen words,—even the old lisp. And now Wood's wife, putting spurs to her steed, is beside my lord whispering, and nodding in the direction of the Beauty. And my lord says, "Ah, to be sure. A capital idea!" And away the aide-de-camp canters, and is beside the Beauty in a second. "Oh, you must. His lordship makes it a point." There is a joke among the men about the Beauty's singing, and great fun is looked for from the sentimental chanting of the Beauty. "Oh, I say, you must now. You shan't get off. Sit down, Talbot, and give us that little thing of your own."

Reluctantly he agrees, but he is so

happy he would do anything. Yes, he would give them a short thing he composed—a mere trifle—"One last and lingering smile." He had not his faithful accompanyist with him; but he had brought the music—by a sort of accident he seemed to convey—and a young lady was on the spot put to the duty. Then he began plaintively and sweetly:—

"He stood beside me at the door," ϰ. τ. λ.

The "men" nudged each other at his sweetest passages. They were intensely amused, and chuckled at the Beauty's pathos. As he rose, a hearty man said,—

"Of course that was yourself, eh? Drawn from life, eh?"

"How?"

"Oh, the lingering smile, of course; and an uncommon lingering one it was,

I'm sure. They couldn't get rid of it."

The Beauty was coldly repelling this familiarity, when a soft but firm voice tingled in his ear,—

"Whether founded on fact or no, it is a good song, Mr. Talbot. Not forgotten me, I hope?"

Who was this?

At the other end of the room there was a commotion. A tall, pink-faced, wiry man was pompously offering greetings and excuses mixed with many a "my lord, my lord."

The Beauty started when he saw the face from which the voice had issued. It was Mrs. Labouchere, dressed in velvet and jewels; from a girl become a matron, with a tone of majesty and stateliness, her features firm, grown more hardened and classical, and with an interest of grief in

her face. The fire in her eyes had intensified. She was surprisingly handsome, assured, and *dangerous.*

She had found the seaport unendurable; and, moreover, she wanted some *action*, some doing, to take her thoughts off. A son of this Lord Bindley had been in Colonel Labouchere's corps—Harry Bindley—and admired her cleverness, her "talk," her wit; in short, it would seem, everything but *herself*, which he could not admit. After his glowing description, she was included in Mr. Hardman's invitations. That gentleman had been particularly confounded and put out by it.

"I am sorry, Rosa," he said apologising solemnly, when she met him in London, "that I shall have to leave you here; I have been asked to Bindley, to Lord Bindley's, a friend of mine. You

know this place, and are welcome to entertain yourself here. I have told my coachman he is to hold himself at your service; my carriage and horses you can use."

"Dear father," she said, calmly, "they have asked me also; and you will think it strange, but I must go."

Mr. Hardman grew red and hot. His weak soul looked to the monopoly of the invitation—to his royalty, as it were, in the favour of the lord.

"Going to Bindley! O, folly! What would *you* do there?"

"I have led such a life ever since—chafing, and fretting, and mourning—with the iron entering into my very heart. I want to fly from myself—for a time."

"Iron nonsense! You are left pretty well off. But I really can't have you

there. I have reasons of my own; and, to tell you the truth, I don't think my Lord Bindley would be anxious to have you. In your present spirits, you would not be an addition to the company."

"Father, pray don't weary me further by discussion; but I *must* go there. I have told you the reason."

"Ah, I know," sneered the man of business; "to look about and pick up a husband. Very soon though; ain't it?"

She gave him a look of warning—a wicked one; yet he felt there was as much contempt as danger in it. He stalked away, and she could allow him the indemnity of grumbling and stamping.

Remarkable looking as she was before she married Colonel Labouchere, she was now greatly changed. Whether from his training, or the odd, adventurous, social

life out in Gibraltar, she had acquired a style and character of manner, which she wanted; something akin to the change which turns the country lad into the smart soldier. Besides, grief and some other trials had given a firmness to her face; and from the time, on her entering the room, her ear caught the plaintive sound of the Beauty's notes, a sparkle came into her eyes, as though the fires of the brain and soul within had been stirred into a crackling blaze. Powerful eyes they seemed; and perhaps it occurred to her as a strange omen, received with exultation, that she should have entered exactly as the Beauty was commencing his simple lay.

The appearance of this stately woman caused a sensation. Mr. Bolton, busy in corners, telling, softly, anecdotes which

might have been commentated on by references to particular pages of the Peerage (as thus—"see 'Combermere,' p. 50; see 'Duke of Manchester,' p. 100, &c.), raised his head slowly. Of course he knew all about her;" at least she was like "Lady Jane Minton."

The Woods, spurring over the plain, drew the reins of their respective chargers, to reflect in what way she could be turned to account for the sports and pastimes of Bindley. The Malcolm girls looked at her from afar distrustfully; while the host, a well-known connoisseur of that article of *virtù* known as "a fine woman," was greatly pleased with the sensation produced by his new guest, and for the first time spoke warmly to Mr. Hardman.

"I am so glad you brought Mrs. Labou-

chere; we are greatly indebted to you, indeed."

His lordship was presently improving his acquaintance.

"Hope you are not tired with your journey, Mrs. Labouchere. So kind of you to come to us in this way; and I assure you we shall be as quiet as possible. This is just one of our little yearly domestic gatherings. No fuss or publicity; only a little enjoyment among ourselves."

But the eyes into which he looked were travelling away over to the Beauty, who, unaccustomed to such generous compliments outside his own family, was rather wistfully looking towards the new figure, who had shown such an unexpected enthusiasm. In a few moments she was beside him.

"You have not forgotten an old friend, I see," she said, in a low voice; "and one who wants friends sadly *now*. When I was near the door, as I came up-stairs, and heard your voice, and that song, it so touched me—it went home to me here."

"O you remember my little song!" he said, pleased. "I know I only sang it for you once."

"It is really strange," she said, reflectively; "I heard it just as I left, as I was going away to happiness; and now, as I enter, I hear it again."

"Well, we may hope you are coming back to happiness."

"Not if some people can help it," she said—not to him. "There are those here who do not like me, who would humiliate and undermine me, if they could. They would not care how I suffered."

The Beauty did not take a deep or tragic view of things.

"O, I know," he said, carelessly. "You and Mrs. Talbot did not hit it off very well; but there was nothing in it really. That I am positive of."

She looked at him with a sort of curiosity, but more with contempt.

"Ah! of course. I suppose I magnify things. And how are they? That gentle girl, too?"

The Beauty never liked people to say "your daughter." That gentle girl was a much more suitable phrase, and he was grateful for it.

"O they are famous," he said. "They are both at home. I have promised to be back there on Saturday, to keep her birthday."

"Her!—whose?"

"Mrs. Talbot's. Livy always likes to make a sort of festival of the business. Last year I composed a song specially. A very pretty girl, a neighbour of ours, wrote the words for me. Cramer published it. It was called 'Her Natal Day;' and "the Band" said it was flowing and melodious."

"If it be flowing and melodious, I should give the world to hear it."

"O dear, I'd sing it for you with pleasure; they'll be asking me again presently. And you really like my songs? They are not ambitious, you know; and I don't pretend to be a regular master, and all that; but they are fairly good, you know, in their way; and Challope, a man that sings in the royal choir, told me he had seen things of the regular fellows far worse."

"Ah, that was praise indeed. But you leave here to be home on Saturday?"

"O yes; I have promised solemnly. I suppose the best part of the affair here will be over by then?"

"No; beginning, they told me. And your——that amiable girl is anxious for this——"

"O, I suppose so," he said, impatiently. "Both of 'em have settled it. You know they look on it as something sacred, and all that. We've never missed it once."

"Oh, I am sorry; the real amusement will begin here by then. The best people will be dropping in by that time; but—Master Talbot must go home to school."

He looked "put out" at this speech.

"School! I hope have done with all that."

Mrs. Wood here caracoled up, as

it were throwing her horse upon his haunches.

"Another song, Mr Talbot; his lordship is most anxious. Any little thing you may have off by heart."

"O," said Mrs. Labouchere, "you will, I know. That thing you told me of—'The Natal Day.'"

The Beauty got through his little melody, the marked attention and interest of the newly arrived securing him the best audience he had had as yet. She explained to his lordship that she felt Mr. Talbot was quite an old friend, or rather, he was associated with some very happy days. People, at the end, cried, so influenced is the herd, "Well done, Talbot, you gave that out well." The Woods, feeling how matters were going, were spurring wildly about the field, and casting about

for a new venture. The Beauty took all this as so much homage to himself; already he felt the bands of the late bondage slipping slowly down to his feet. His voice rose into a louder key, "O, I have written a quantity of things. I have volumes by me. I have always something on the stocks, just to take up when I have a moment. That thing I sang first, 'One last and lingering smile' has always been a hit."

Mr. Bolton, selfish in his generation, had hitherto rather "pooh-poohed" the Beauty; but had tact enough to see that his glass was rising, and would rise faster under patronage. He now struck in.

"I saw a copy of that song on the pianoforte at Mantower when I was staying there."

"O yes, Lady Jane sings it," (She

ought to have paid it that courtesy, as the Beauty had sent it to her.)

"And how the deuce do you do it, Talbot?" another asked. "Now how does the idea strike you first?"

The Beauty smiled with compassion. "These things a man can't teach. It comes by nature. Now that 'Lingering smile' I could no more tell how, or when, it came into my head, than I could that—that candlestick," added the Beauty getting rather confused in his illustration. "It comes to you, and there it is."

"And you catch him and keep him."

"You must explain all this to me, Mr. Talbot," said Mrs. Labouchere, who had come up and listened. "It is very interesting; other composers will not condescend to let us know how they work. They think they are betraying secrets."

Other composers! Her tone was so firm and bold and genuine, that this compliment produced no smile; the public standing round and confirming it. That night went on very pleasantly. The Beauty went to his room with a feeling that he had taken one huge stride backwards some ten or fifteen years, and was enjoying his old life once more

The breakfast table at Bindley was an enlivening scene, a pleasant and gay expectation of an enjoyable day, shooting, driving, what not, eddying down the table. The Beauty came in late, an Adonis of the morning, in the old mauve stockings,—sweet-scented and curled. He had on a sort of velvet jacket, which made the effect rich and "Titianesque." His irreverent friends nudged each other, and complimented him ironically; but there

was a quiet self-sufficieney about the Beauty which was nearly as defensive as real dignity. Mrs. Labouchere heard these remarks;

"Hallo, Talbot, what time is the flower show? When does the ball begin?" and goodnaturedly, as it seemed to the host, sheltered him.

"Mr. Talbot has an artist's eye for colour." She was now quite at home, the centre of a sort of curiosity and attraction; and the Woods, like managers, congratulated themselves on having engaged "such a star."

"I'll tell you what we have been planning,"—said his lordship, "and Wood here says he will arrange it all without any trouble—give a little concert and reception on Saturday night in the new hall. We are so strong in musical talent, that

really it would be a shame not to avail ourselves of the opportunity. What do you think, Mrs. Labouchere?"

She had come down cold and abstracted once more. The chatter of voices about her seemed to annoy her. "I suppose so," she said abstractedly, "one must amuse the herd."

"Yes, so we must. You hear, Talbot, Wood will be offering you an engagement, and you must sing that song of yours—this, 'Give us another smile.'"

"'The last and lingering smile' is the proper name, I think," said Mrs. Labouchere, smiling. "Mr. Talbot will set me right."

"The eminent tenor, Mr Talbot. For one night only! Great attraction!" said one of the clowns of that social circus; and did produce a laugh.

Mr. Talbot here—Talbot there! It was wonderful. His song, his voice, to make such an effect! His cheek literally glowed as the lady recalled the correct name of his song. Surely, this was a change. The glow of old times came back into his cheeks.

"I should be delighted," he said, "to do what I could. It is an excellent idea—a regular concert. O, but unfortunately——"

He stopped; he recalled the festival at home, to which he was bound to present himself.

This roused Mrs. Labouchere.

"What is unfortunate?"

"O, I have to be back—an engagement."

"O nonsense," said Lord Bindley; "we are not to lose our tenor. You must

write and tell them that I and Mrs. Labouchere, and the company here, cannot spare you. We want to bring down the house with your 'lingering smile.' Ha! ha!"

Wonderful again! A delicious feeling at his heart—one unknown to him for years, during this state of cipherhood.

Mrs. Labouchere was now alive—all eager.

"Mr. Talbot must tell us of this prior claim. Is it another country house?"

"Well—no," he said, confusedly.

"What, a home one! O, I see; we must respect that—a promise to Mrs. Talbot!"

"Why, yes; exactly," the Beauty said, hardly knowing what he was saying. "Her birthday is on Saturday, you know."

His eye appealed to Mrs. Labouchere, for he was a little confused—unaccustomed to this publicity.

"*I* know!" said that lady, in her hard manner. "I! Not at all, I assure you. What *could* I know about Mrs. Talbot? I only met her once or twice."

Every one looked at her: there was something so hard and pointed in the way she spoke these words. Her face seemed to change as they looked.

(After breakfast, several, talking together, agreed there was "something odd about that woman.")

Mr. Hardman, up to this quite overlooked and smothered by his neighbours, conceived that his daughter was adding to his unpopularity.

"*I* have had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Talbot, my lord. She has been at

our house; a most charming person to meet; of the—er—highest—er fashion—and connection."

"O, indeed!" said the host, with a polite stare.

Mr. Hardman felt that, with the best intentions, he had said too much. His daughter came to the rescue.

"And it is the more generous in my father to praise this lady so handsomely, as we did not get on so well, you will recollect, Mr. Talbot. Our families did not exactly coalesce."

"O, nonsense," said her father, colouring. "Really this is absurd!"

"No," she said, firmly, and at the same time smiling; "she did not like *us*. She looked down on us—a foolish thing now-a-days. On that account she and I

are sworn foes. You will forgive me, Mr. Talbot ?"

Every one again said, after breakfast, that there was something "curious about that Mrs Labouchere."

"You must talk to our friend Talbot, Mrs. Labouchere," the host said. "We can't have our concert all spoiled by the absence of the tenor. You will find him an excuse. If it is properly put before the lady, it will be all right. O, you must stay, Talbot."

The Beauty thought of the solemn obligations—the sweet face of Livy—the expectant women. He felt it was impossible—about as impossible as that the sun should not rise.

"O, they expect me," he said. "I'm so sorry. And"—he added, wistfully—"I should like it so. You see, it's her

birthday; and I'm to give her presents, and she's to have one for me; and it's never been omitted since we were married. O," added the Beauty, with a wistful air of doubt, that was almost comic, "I *know* it would be quite out of the question."

The men looked one to the other.

"Not an hour's grace?" said one. "Must go back to the minute? Come, don't be selfish, Talbot. Think of *us!*"

"We must not make a rebel of him," said Mrs. Labouchere, excitedly. "No, Mr. Talbot; you shall go back to your school, and be a good boy."

The Beauty had an instinct that the company was laughing at him, but was not quite sure.

The breakfast party then broke up.

Mr. Hardman was not reaping all the glory and distinction he had counted on.

His lordship was by no means as attentive as he had expected. He had counted on a certain homage to his "long-headedness" —not intimacy, which might come later. But he would have liked consultation—*e.g.*, "Here is Mr. Hardman, who knows more than any of us; Mr. Bolton here was asking about the gold question, Mr. Hardman; just give me your opinion on this point. We are putting out some moneys at interest."—This he would have liked, though it rather pointed at "the shop." But Lord Bindley seemed to pass him by, and "not to have time" to consult him. He was, indeed, utterly out of place in the great house, among the great people, and roamed about shy, and purposeless. Ladies in the little scattered morning rooms, as he prowled in and faded out, said,—"Here's this dreadful manufactur-

ing man again!" However, he had one satisfaction, a long morning in the library, where he wrote many letters to people to whom he would not otherwise have written, all for the sake of the glorified heading, "*Bindley, near Chester*," and also for the postscript—"Be good enough to direct to me here, where I shall be for a few days—*under cover to Lord Bindley*." Most pleasant of all was it to write in this strain to some of his business friends; after which, as he could not shoot, nor walk far, and as his host did not think fit to devote himself to showing the grounds, gardens, &c., he became a sort of wanderer, finally establishing himself, in his gold glasses, in the library, over a great and statesmanlike work. Somehow it did not seem that his approach to the ministerial character was at all hastening on.

The Beauty, in a sort of dream, had wandered into the drawing-room, bringing with him all the savours of Araby. It was a pleasure to the eye to see this dainty man, or rather half man, among the gilded appointments and bright stuffs of that room. The ladies tolerated him, and even the stately Louisa Mary, Countess of Seaman approved and pronounced him "an elegant creature." The Ladies Mariner quite snubbed him, and literally did not waste more than a couple of "no's" and "yes's" on him, during their whole stay.

A married man, forsooth! One other reason for the Countess's approbation might have been her sudden dislike to that widow who had come among them, and before whom she would almost have paid money to have a red danger

signal carried, to warn off the men, or have employed a spare daughter to "nurse her," as rival omnibus companies do. She had called him to her side, and was pleasantly chatting with him over some "dear Lady Minton," when Mrs. Labouchere appeared at the door in all the coquetry of widowhood, and standing there said, calmly,—

"Oh, Mr. Talbot, about your song. Will you come to the music-room?"

By that desertion, the Beauty lost for ever the patronage of the Countess.

Mrs. Labouchere, without waiting for his decision, had walked on down the corridor, her face looking on the ground, her hands joined behind. As she turned the angle, she said, aloud and quite careless who heard her,—

"Yes, that is my mission. It is too

tempting, and she herself has put him into my hands."

There was no one in the music-room.

"Would you redeem your promise," she said, "and sing me your song, calmly and without the fuss of people listening and talking?"

The Beauty, enchanted, sat down and sang, a little nervously, his favourite, "He gave one last and lingering smile." She was not rapturous in praise, but judicious.

"It is good music, and I like it better each time. Just one more, Mr. Talbot."

He gratified her with the one "now on the stocks."

"This," he said, "I am now composing. It is in rather a raw state; but I assure you no one else has heard it."

He also gave her "ideas" of others,

and, in short, spent a most delightful half-hour. Suddenly she said,—

"What a pity! It is like a fatality, and so hard on that good-natured Lord Bindley. It is most unfortunate!"

"What, about the concert? O, yes, so provoking! But you know I couldn't well——O, they'd never forgive it,—she and Livy. O, out of the question!"

"How would any one think of asking you? Alas! I once could put myself in their place; now I cannot. But we owe something to Lord Bindley. Could you not write to them? Birthdays are often postponed—kept on the day following; and if you said you'd be at home by the first train on Sunday morning, no reasonable people——"

"Oh, I declare, yes!" cried the Beauty,

in delight, on whom the dreadful sacrifice had been weighing.

"You must think it over," she said, coldly; "and find some way of managing it. In a house like this we are all bound to make a few sacrifices, and at least, an exertion. Would you mind singing another song? I have not heard a note of music for months." So the Beauty sang again. Such a happy morning it proved for him.

CHAPTER III.

A DOUBT.

WHILE the Beauty sings, we look across the country to his pleasant home, through the glasses of that little cabinet, where are enshrined the two gentle female hearts. Their eyes would pierce, if they could, all the plantations, the hills, and mountains, and towns that lay between them and their darling. As it was, they filled up many an hour, speculating as to what the Beauty was busy with, how he was amusing himself. They had a full and accurate list of the company, as they thought, and they knew there could be no danger. He

was sure to be good friends with that old Lady Seaman. The Woods were fussy, but safe people. The Mariner girls "would not look at him." They were very happy together, and could enjoy themselves, for, to say the truth, the Beauty was rather a heavy strain and responsibility. They were not alone, for that good fellow, young Hardman, was over with them morning, noon, and night. He, too, had a great deal off his mind; for he had got leave from his colonel, and had returned as soon as the Towers was free. His honest good will, his open devotion to Livy, increasing every hour, made him a welcome visitor, and before long, Mrs. Talbot saw what was coming, just as the careless lounger, standing by the water's edge, sees two blocks of wood slowly, but surely, drifting together. Livy was human, was a girl—

a tender, impulsive girl—though there seemed to be an impression that she was bound by a vow of almost conventual celibacy.

Mrs. Talbot soon saw with a sigh that her inclination to the young man could not now be checked without much suffering and misery to both. There was also her own enmity to *that* house; but that had gone into the past. The woman had been routed. She was, besides, a widow, and had bitterly atoned for any offences in that way. So she could justly tolerate, if not afford to look back with pity and contempt. Livy herself, knowing towards what a forbidden country she was straying, yet to her so delightful and attractive, kept her eyes turned away as she walked on. It was so new and pleasant, if she but dared. But her vocation seemed to

lead her in another direction. How noble, how generous, how "off-hand" and manly he was, so tender and delicate, and yet so bold and generous. He had that natural simplicity, so charming in a man, which to some has the air of egotism, from telling personal experiences; but which, indeed, only arises from a wish to please. Now that he was relieved from the Upas tree at home, that dreadful tree whose branches were of "Brummagem" metal, and kept the bright sunlight from falling, he seemed as happy as a child.

He was full of plans for their entertainment, and it was he who suggested that special journey to London, when all the shops of the Mechi exploitation were to be ransacked to choose a dressing-case for the Beauty—a surprise for him on his return. There were to be new ivory

brushes; the others had, indeed, served their full time, veterans that might go into hospital. It was properly Mrs. Talbot's office to receive such an offering; but transactions with the Beauty of this description generally took the shape of some trifle to her, to be compensated for by something of ten times its worth to him. The giving a present to her amounted, in fact, to the giving one to him.

They had some delightful days in London, engaged in these exploring parties, and at last a small "chest" was selected, stored with costly vessels for holding all sorts of scented and greasy things, with the Beauty's crest and monogram peering out of an ambuscade at every corner. The cost of this sumptuous present was defrayed out of

certain little savings put by for many years, but which were not half so valuable as the anticipated delight and surprise of their Beauty.

During these days the young man has been growing more and more sensible of the sweet nature of Livy—more drawn to her every hour. Mrs. Talbot had seen, and seen again, and one night, when the Beauty had been gone but three or four days—her old fashionable heart seemed to soften—the memory of the dear child's devotion and unwearied labours in her cause came back on her, and it seemed to her it might now be time for all this to end; so when she had sent Livy away on some pretence she led the young man on to speak of his attachment, which he did with a delighted openness, enlarging on his prospects and difficulties.

"My father will, of course, never agree to it; he wishes me to *buy*—that is his own word—some young girl who belongs to some noble family. But I *could* not do it, even if I had never seen your daughter. It seems to me so mean, so base—this trafficking in love and riches and titles."

A faint tint came into her face; for this had been *her* old "trade." He did not see it, and went on—

"Not that my father is to blame, as that is the fashion after which he has lived, and in which he was born. But I have great friends who will push me on. I know, too, that my sister was foolish enough to offend you, but a heavy chastisement has overtaken her, and she has trials enough to punish her. You are too generous to think any more of *that*."

Mrs. Talbot was pleased. She liked this boy; she would not be sorry to snatch him from among that corrupt set. She spoke her mind frankly.

"Our ideas change so strangely, I cannot account for it. But still it will be for the best, though I thought we never could bring ourselves to part with her. But still she has done so much for us—she has been a joy in the house—that I must not be too selfish, but must at last think of her."

"O, how good and kind of you," the young man cried in a rapture. "But you shall not lose her. We shall always be with, or near, you. I shall get some place close by, and we shall be so happy."

The colour came into our Livy's face when she was told of this proposal.

She could hardly believe her senses. It seemed to her so natural that the old arrangement—the old "watch-dog" arrangement — should go on until she became old or died. Such a sacrifice seemed to her but the natural order. Within that same order it seemed unaccountable that her dream of such things should be accepted.

This news was to be a surprise for the Beauty when he returned. Of course his consent would have to be asked in a formal way—a courtesy that was due; but his "ways" were so well known by this time that, as conjurors can extract any wine named from the wonderful bottle, so could they extract any answer they pleased from their Beauty. He would, indeed, find an *inconvenience* in the loss of that indefatigably affectionate girl.

They had now all but planned the wedding; for a kind of soft anticipation, and even romance, seemed to fill Mrs. Talbot. She spoke a great deal of being "unselfish;" and, indeed, it seemed to have flashed on her suddenly that, after all, it was only fitting that her daughter should enter on the same course as she herself had done. As for Livy, this gracious enfranchisement was something too charming. She would otherwise have never let either thought enter her gentle brains. It was as though she was a child enlarged into a garden, among the flowers. It was so with her young lover, though he trembled as he thought of his rough and rude father. Indeed, if a strict analysis had been made of Mrs. Talbot's motives, some such earthy sediment as this — a satisfaction in frustrating his

schemes—would have been found precipitated at the bottom.

One evening Dick had dined with them, as usual, when the carrier arrived with a small chest. This was the Mechian present, sent down from London, all furnished and glorious. There was great delight in opening and laying out these noble trophies—brushes, pots, &c.—each of which was splendid with a most complicated monogram.

There were actual cries of joy; but louder than the cries were the anticipations —how delighted the Beauty would be! how enchanted! for he had not the remotest conception that so costly a present was in store for him. Usually it took the shape of a little two-guinea jewel case for his studs, rings, &c.; now that of studs and rings themselves; but this was some-

thing gigantic—as the resources of the two women were somewhat strained—and was in the nature of a premium for a good boy, which Mr. Talbot had exhibited himself to be for so many years.

Just as the treasure had been put by, and the raptures were over, the postman's ring was heard; and Livy, starting up, as was her custom, flew to take in the letter. She came back holding it up in triumph. It was from the Beauty—his first letter.

"And to me, mamma; and *such* a long one."

"To *you?*" repeated the mother. "How very strange!"

The daughter's pleasure made it seem only delightful to her. It was opened, and found to be amazingly long for the Beauty. It ran:—

"Dearest Livy,

"I got your letter, and was glad to hear that you and mamma are so well. We are all very pleasant in this house, which is full of people, and very nice people too. They are all so civil to me, asking me to sing; and Lord Bindley has got quite fond of "The Last and Lingering Smile," and asks for it every night. They are delighted, too, with my new song, and want me to publish it at once; so I think I shall, as soon as I can get a moment of time to put it in shape. There is to be a grand event upon Saturday next—a great concert, given to the people round. Over one hundred and fifty invited. Only think! I have had *deputations* coming to me to ask me to be the *leading tenor*, and Lord Bindley is quite serious about it, and will be out

with us for ever. He says I will *spoil* his concert, and he will have to give it up. I really hardly know what to do, there is such pressure brought to bear on one. They think it so childish and unmeaning, as it would only make the difference of a day; and they say I could get the first train next morning, and be with you early. Of course I told them I was pledged to you, that I had never missed it once, and could not do it for anything. So I told them; but they say that all the great people—the queen, &c.—change about their birthdays, according to convenience—that is, the keeping of them. Of course I shall go to you, as I *said* so; but I am in a most disagreeable fix, as Lord Bindley thinks it 'unmeaning' and 'ungracious.' So a lady here said it had quite *that* air. Of course it was not her view; but she

said people would *say* that. However, I am quite ready to do *whatever* you wish; and, *of course*, keep to what I said, at all risks.

"Ever, my dear Livy, yours, &c.,

"T."

There was a silence after this letter was finished; and, indeed, Livy's voice grew unsteady as she went on. She did not give the latter part with quite the dramatic enthusiasm and spirit with which she had started.

"What does he mean?" said Mrs. Talbot, looking about her.

"O, mamma, dear! to give up your birthday—and the beautiful present you got for him! But," she added, seeing her mother's hopeless face, "you see he *is* coming; yes, mamma, and with all that

pleasure, as he says. O, it is noble of him!"

"But he wishes to stay!—he means to stay. That is, he would think of it—of abandoning us, who are always thinking of him. O, but it was folly—sheer folly! —and I deserve it."

Livy knew what her mother meant, and was silent.

"This is always the way," Mrs. Talbot went on, "with characters of his sort. Give them liberty but for a day, and they lose their heads. So unkind, too, to give us up for anything—for a song!"

"He will do nothing of the kind," Livy said. "You see it is not dear Beauty who speaks, but some of those people. They have some object in keeping him. He does sing that song so nicely!"

"Some object in keeping him?" Mrs.

Talbot repeated, mechanically, looking at her daughter. "No doubt; some foolish girl has been flattering him. Well, he must come back in spite of all his Lord Bindleys."

Mrs. Talbot wrote an answer herself that night. It ran:—

"My dearest Beauty,

"We are delighted you are enjoying yourself so much. We long to see you, and we know that you are anxious to be with us. Of course, when they know it is my birthday, they will see you could not stay. Livy and the ponies will be at the station at nine, P.M. We have got a little present, which we know you will be pleased with; and, besides, we have a bit of news to surprise you with. So come quickly, dear, and even before my birthday if you can."

After this letter had been despatched, Livy somehow felt that her mother was very grave and troubled. The mother and daughter had a longer talk that night than usual, and the mother's last words were, "It was a folly for him to go at all. Some foolish girl has been flattering him."

CHAPTER IV.

"THE PROPER THING TO DO."

EVERYONE at Bindley pronounced it was a most "delightful" time—that nothing could be more charming than Lord Bindley himself. That concert, too! It was such a capital notion, that of giving a concert. The versatile Miss Malcolms—who had what is called "a hearty will" for anything, and if necessary would have gone in for prizes at a gymnastic festival; anything, in short, so as to "keep up" matters—were contributing themselves in the most ingenious variety of shapes. "A Duett (Scotch)," by the Sisters Mal-

colm; "A Solo," by the elder Sister Malcolm; "Ditto," by the younger; "Duett (English)," by the Sisters Malcolm. They were, in theatrical parlance, "general utility" girls, and would take any part in social life, from a singing, flirting girl, to a demure maiden. Another gentleman had consented "to take a part" —one Mr. X——, as the French call one of the insignificants, and who indeed has no more need to have a name to trouble others to remember him by, than one of the stage soldiers who carries a banner need be known to the leading player. What was a little thing at first, had grown by a sort of consent into something of great anxiety and interest. "The Concert" was on all minds. They had all set their souls on the hazard of the die. The Woods were on horseback—socially

speaking—day and night. The invitations had gone out, and the rehearsals were in progress. There was Mr. Talbot—but the Woods, inspired, we may suppose, by Mrs. Labouchere, had given out that he was not to be asked or worried; it was to be *assumed* that he could not remain. With a curiously "meaning" manner, Lord Bindley adopted this tone, and gave it to be understood that "he did not wish Talbot to be pressed;" and the servile crowd carried out the instruction with delight—nay, rather bettered it; for they felt they were admitted to a sort of companionship in mystery—a thing in which weak natures hug themselves.

The concert was in every mouth. The invitations were out, and even the local paper had a paragraph about the "dis-

tinguished galaxy of talent now assembled at Bindley."

The Beauty alone did not share in the general enthusiasm. He went "moping" about—gloomy, uncomfortable, and much troubled in mind.

The post brought him Mrs. Talbot's letter, and he read it with fresh discomfort.

"I knew it," he said to himself. "Just like them. *Think of nothing but themselves* —so selfish!"

This from him to those two faithful, hard-working women, whose hands had been under his feet!

"All my little enjoyments interfered with in this way. Of course, I'll have to give it up. It's always the way—always!"

Never was man so treated, never did

schoolboy so pout and glower; and in this mood did Mrs. Labouchere find him. He told her, reluctantly.

"What, they won't let you off?"

"O, no. She expects me;—that is, she doesn't seem to see any need of my staying. I'm sure I don't understand why."

"O, if you don't, we can't," she said, laughing. "Your case is a very hard one, Mr. Talbot. You should get up an agitation, and lay it all before the public, who, I am sure, would support you."

"I am sure they would," the Beauty answered, with perfect gravity. "The only thing I have set my heart on—that I would give my eyes for!"

"It is very unfortunate; but they can't be so hard-hearted. Did you put it well before them?"

There was a sort of scoffing tone in all this; but it led him on.

"Yes, of course I did. Any one else would have agreed."

"And they won't allow you?—won't give their consent? I don't know which to wonder at most—their stern despotism, or your unswerving obedience. Why, such a husband as you should reside at the British Museum, to be shown to the good rustics from the country."

The Beauty coloured.

"O, it is very easy to turn anything into ridicule—very."

"Turn into ridicule?" she said, with a sharp, stern look, from which he shrank. "Pray, what do you mean? I would only do that to an enemy. Do you mean that I have been turning *you* into ridicule?"

The Beauty stammered, "O, not exactly."

"Not exactly!" she repeated. "But yes, exactly. Then let me explain, Mr. Talbot, since you do not understand. What I meant was, that it seemed a great contrast to the behaviour of our habitual lords and masters, who do not submit so implicitly to the rule of a wife and daughter. It seems a sort of phenomenon. Even at a distance their authority seems to extend. It is quite interesting to see it."

"O, there is no authority, and that sort of thing," said the Beauty, colouring. "You are so clever, you know, and you like hitting at people."

"Like hitting at people! Well, *you* should not say that! What I said was all in your own interest, to save you from remarks and speeches, and from

furnishing amusement. However, I meet the usual return. That stroke was a little unkind of you, Mr. Talbot."

"I didn't mean—indeed no," he said, in confusion. "But what I wanted to say was, I could do as I liked—like every man. As to their laughing—"

"Laughing!—oh, no, I did not say that. But I merely meant a friendly part. However, I shall give no more advice now to any one."

"Why do you speak in that way?" said the Beauty, pettishly. "I am sure I can't please every one. O, I should so like to stay! But then they will make such a fuss and worry. They take things so seriously, really a man doesn't know what to do."

"Oh, a man *could* know," said Mrs. Labouchere, seriously; "if he only thought a little, he would not need anyone's

advice. In the present instance you are Lord Bindley's guest. He is your host—he is a man of rank, and he asks this trifle. I tell you freely you are bound to put aside any little domestic matters about birthdays, and the like. It seems childish and old-fashioned. You asked me; so I speak plainly."

The Beauty had some very miserable thoughts, saying to himself it was cruel and scandalous, and that he wouldn't put up with it.

Mr. Wood now came dashing up, and flung himself from his foaming steed—that fanciful one we have spoken of.

"Here, Talbot," he said, "I am sending to the printers. Here, will you sing or not? Yes or no."

"O, I am sure I should so like—but I can't say at—"

"O, then, you won't. We can't keep the bills waiting. And by the way I must tell you, Talbot, his Lordship thinks he has not been treated fairly in this matter. Every one else helps cheerfully and makes sacrifices, but you are making all this fuss. Best go to him openly, and tell him your wife won't allow it—"

"There is nothing of the kind," said the Beauty, ready to cry almost. "That is some story they have got up. I am not such a fool. I could stay at any moment."

"Then show that you can stay; and that will dispose of all such ill-natured remarks," said she.

The Beauty was quite "put out." He had a good deal of the ill-nature of a monkey, or of the spoiled child

"You say that rather spitefully, as if

you wanted to annoy me; but I could give a reason for it, Mrs. Labouchere."

Her haughty, cold stare, accompanied with a drawing up of the figure, he did not soon forget.

"Go on," she said; "explain what you mean."

"O nothing," he faltered almost; "indeed, nothing."

"That is, you would withdraw your speech. As you please, Mr. Talbot. There are some who would not quite like that story to be revived. However, the *intention* was not generous on your side, Mr. Talbot—a little unkind, as return for my taking interest in your concerns. Sing and compose your ballads for the future. Give a thousand 'last and lingering smiles.' I shall never interfere."

With this she passed on, leaving the

Beauty dreadfully ashamed of himself, and full of compunction. Up comes Lord Bindley.

"Oh, Talbot, sorry you're leaving us; can't get leave, eh? Never mind these fellows laughing a bit. You're quite right to be a decent husband; and don't mind us now,—for, what do you say, Miss Malcolms have found us out a tenor, and they are going to telegraph for him?"

A thousand emotions rushed on the Beauty. He felt himself called on to act. It was absurd, ridiculous—putting him into such a position; he could hardly forgive himself for having put *himself* into such a position. All doubt was gone, and, without hesitation, he answered,—

"O, I intend to stay, if you will allow me; and do my best for the concert."

"Capital!" said Lord Bindley. "Now everything is going well. Ah, here's Wood, just in time. Well, he'll stay, Wood."

Wood had his hand full of papers.

"Ah, I knew he would. Then come this way, Talbot, and give me the exact titles of your songs for the printers. His lordship will excuse you."

"Yes, go with Wood."

It was delightful—too exciting. Going with Wood, he set down the "'Last and Lingering Smile,' *ballad;* music by A. Talbot, Esq.," his pulse fluttering.

There was a sensation through the house—a kind of diffused joy. (So it seemed to the Beauty.)

"We hear you have consented to stay, Talbot. His lordship feels quite indebted to you," said one, coming up to him

later. Then, dropping his voice,—"We shan't forget it to you; and you have done the proper thing. I said it to him."

The Beauty began to consider himself quite a hero. He was in a tumult of delight. Everybody was so good, so kind, so charming. This dandified Rip Van Winkle had awakened from his long sleep, and was walking through the village —wondering, and delighted at all he saw. Here was Mendelssohn Jackson, organist and local teacher, to whom his lordship had entrusted the direction of the concert, looking for him. Mendelssohn Jackson was a composer himself, and had written "The Soldier's Grave," with other ballads well-known—among his pupils. Would Mr. Talbot favour him with half an hour, to try over his song?

Mendelssohn Jackson was a character

in his way, whose aim in life was to strike out some obsequious compromise between the gentleman and the music-master—that odiously low designation. He drew the line between himself and the common fellows of the profession, "the grinders," as he pleasantly called "the men that carry the hod, you know." Had he been willing to carry the hod, he might have made a good deal of money; but his wish to be considered an equal of genteel people made him submit to some heavy sacrifices, and to a system of heavy sacrifices—these persons having condescension enough to avail themselves of his gratuitous services. He had been delighted when Lord Bindley had placed the whole affair under his direction, as so many of his pupils learned, when he looked hurriedly at his watch.

"Bless me—must be off to Bindley—take a fly—pay the man double—some good talent there—a voice that I could make something of. Clever girls, those Malcolms."

His demeanour to Mr. Talbot was characteristic.

"What is this?" he said, at the piano, opening the music leisurely. "'Give him a lingering smile.' Tum-tum-ti — nice, and pretty—melody flows. You should have a diminished seventh there, that would have brought you back again. Very nice! There, of course, you have the burden. I can tell you, there are some of the hod men, in the big village yonder, get their twenty guineas—for—queer stuff, compared with this. Mortar, eh?—and bad mortar, too. As for that woman, Florizel—not music—not a note

of music in all she writes. Well, let us see. Suppose we begin now."

And the Beauty went through his ditty, to a *sotto voce* accompaniment.

"Fairly done. Open your mouth."

Then Mendelssohn Jackson got out his gold pencil-case.

"Think we could do a little macadamising here. There, that turn would be more the thing, more singable, you know. There again, there seems to be something *short*. We must make sense, you know. Let me see—hm—that will be better."

"O but, you know, that spoils the whole effect. I didn't mean *that*," said the Beauty, much hurt.

"Well, as you like; you know it must balance. However, I dare say it won't be noticed. The rustics haven't wit enough to find it out."

The director of the concert, later, spoke with different voices of this production. It was fair and "singable," without pretension, and Talbot was a gentlemanly fellow. To others of his friends, he inveighed against the scandal of setting him down—him, Mendelssohn Jackson—to play that fellow's trash. "The twaddle that he had strummed out on his piano." To his lordship he spoke in high commendation, especially when his lordship praised himself. "Yes, I think I know a good thing; the moment I heard his voice I picked him out. I said, that will take, that will hit with the public. Yet I have never gone to school in music, eh, Jackson! What I want is to show 'em that I can get up the best music in the country when I like!"

After this excitement, the responsibility

of the heavy step he had taken began to weigh on the Beauty. At all events, he would dismiss it for that day. That night there was the rehearsal. Greater excitement still in the Grand Hall when a few of the tenants' wives and daughters, and all the servants were admitted. It went off admirably. Our Beauty was in Paradise—soft light, softer clouds seemed to be floating about him; everybody was kind, good, charming, and romantic. He was the old self back again, the same figure of his youth, which he had often looked back on, and which he thought had faded out like an old photograph. He sang his song "splendidly" to muttered accompaniment from Mendelssohn Jackson! "take time—now collect yourself, softer, softer, &c." Sometimes the eminent director stopped a piece in the

middle, "Never do, never do. Try back to—let me see—to five, six, seven bars, to where the *tempo primo* comes in."

Thus interrupted in the Scotch duet, the sisters Malcolm began to show signs of ill blood. "Now, hurry on. Won't do, excuse me. Not the thing at all. I heard those Bosioni girls sing it at Exeter Hall; a little more of the 'setting one's cap' style, you know. Now try again." Again were the sisters pursuing a tortuous path "in thirds" like two performers on velocipedes, twisting and winding in parallel lines. Again Mr. Jackson jerked the rein. "Won't do, still." One of the young ladies' cheeks began to glow—the younger's nose. "We had better not sing it at all," one said; "or please let us sing it our way."

"With all my heart," and thereupon

Mr. Jackson allowed his hands to stray very wildly over the keys, now taking a spasm forward like a shying horse, and dragging the young ladies with him; now "jibbing" unaccountably, and not to be got on at all. It was always a foolish thing to offend Mendelssohn Jackson, people said, "he had so much in his power."

Lord Bindley took great credit for the proceedings, and with a wise air, "though he hadn't a note of music in him," declared that he was determined to have good music at that house. But our Beauty, thrilled and fluttered like a young *débutante*—he was "the new tenor" whom Lord Bindley had found out.

After it was over, Mrs. Labouchere was the first to come up and congratulate the blushing performer. "You were angry

with me, to-day, because I spoke candidly, and in your interest. You *set me down*, too."

"I!" said the delighted Beauty. "I set you down! No, indeed."

No, indeed. How many years was it since the Beauty had been accused of setting any one down? Most acceptable flattery.

"But you liked the song—it was your choosing."

"Liked it!" repeated Mrs. Labouchere, without adding a word more; perhaps the briefest, as the most satisfactory, shape of commendation known. It is all in the inflection, and does admirably for the common chroniclers of small beer, though the woman of intelligence coldly asks, "Well, but what did you think of it?"

"I knew you would not be sorry to stay. O, you could hardly have done anything else."

"You think so?" said the Beauty.

"O, not *I*, but everyone. Lord Bindley seems to think you have laid him under an obligation. Of course, something must be put to his vanity; for he boasts that he has discovered a new tenor, which he could not have done had you gone away. You sang well to-night."

The delighted Beauty looked at her with great interest and gratitude.

"How kind of you to say this, to encourage me!"

"We know, too, what a little sacrifice you have made," she added, smiling; "not only in giving up your treat at home, but in boldly facing a certain sort of greeting that awaits you there."

Uneasiness came into his face.

"I am sure I don't care," he said; "it is nothing to me."

She shook her head.

"I am a woman, and know what I should think of such treatment. But were I a man, I know what I should do."

This Beauty could be played upon like a fiddle.

"What? Tell me—do," he said, eagerly.

"What all men of the world—statesmen, soldiers—do when they have something awkward or disagreeable before them—do it boldly, as if it was a matter of course. I naturally do not understand what special relations you may have to your family, but I may assume that you enjoy average liberty; that you do not live a Polish husband under a

Russian wife; that in this nineteenth century there is not in England to be found so comic a state of things as that the head of a house could not outstay his leave a day——"

Again the Beauty was blushing and getting flustered.

"No," she went on; "you have shown that this cannot be said. Some might have yielded to avoid feminine reproaches—things to be always deprecated. Shall I tell you a little passage from my own history? My husband was a soldier, and when I was first married I thought he loved me so, that I could make him do what I pleased. One day he was absent from dinner. I waited and waited until it came to ten o'clock at night, and then he returned. I burst out with a storm of reproaches and upbraidings, which he

took most good-humouredly. This only inflamed me more, and I reproached him haughtily and bitterly. Then he looked at me sternly. 'And what was the reason?' I said. 'A good one,' he said bluntly; 'my will and pleasure. That must do you now. Had you let me speak at first, I should have told you everything, and made you all apologies.' From that moment he was my master. You may smile at my telling you this; but I should like you to think me your friend. And as you have saved us from a difficulty here, we should not like you to have any difficulty in return — though it is an imaginary one."

The Beauty was touched by this sympathy.

"You see," he said, "I was only thinking of the fuss they might make.

Every man hates fuss. But as for doing as I like——"

"O dear, no," she said; "don't twist my words that way. Do as you like, and then I desert you. Savages, Hottentots, do as they like, and a certain sort of husband. No, don't do as you like. But Mr. Talbot knows well the *juste milieu.*"

CHAPTER V.

THE GREAT CONCERT.

When she had gone, the Beauty went to his room, and entering with great importance, said aloud, "Really, most unreasonable!" On the table was a letter—a letter from his Livy.

"My darling Beauty,

"This is a private letter from your own Livy, and of which dear mamma knows nothing. I fear those people may not let you go, and indeed I do not wonder, as our dear Beauty can make himself so

agreeable. But she has set her heart on your being back; and O! it would so mortify her if you were not with her on her birthday. She only thinks of you, and if you but saw the lovely present she has got, as a surprise! It will delight you to see it. But I know my dear papa will do what is right, and *keep to his promise*, and he will recollect that this was a sort of condition, and I have just told mamma I would stake my poor life on dear papa's keeping to his word.

"Your own,

"LIVY."

The Beauty tossed this down fretfully.

"They will worry me to death!"

Alas! the indiscreet little Livy had set down a very foolish expression. Made it a condition! The little boy would not

have been *allowed* out for his holiday if they had thought this!

"This is rather too good. I am not *quite* a child. As Mrs. Labouchere says, this is getting a little too much."

He sat down and wrote promptly:—

"DEAREST LIVY,

"I have just come from the rehearsal. It went off magnificently. I am afraid you and your mother do not exactly see how I stand. Lord Bindley is my host, and there is a certain courtesy due to him when he makes a request. If you were here, you would see this quite clearly. It surely would be ridiculous, and it looks absurd, that I should be *ordered home* to the day, like a schoolboy. It is really very unfortunate, and I have done my best; but I am not called on to appear

boorish or *churlish*, or to spoil the whole thing. My song at the rehearsal was the great success of the night. Lord Bindley calls me *his tenor*, and says he found me out. Everybody is so nice and kind, and seems to take such an interest in me. If I were to put my eyes upon sticks, my dear Livy, I could not leave this; so this is final, and there is no use writing me *any worrying* letters.

"Ever yours,

"T."

He thought this an "uncommon good letter," and went down again to post it.

Mr. Hardman, who still led his pariah life, and, in truth, never had spent so dismal a time, came to him obsequiously.—"You sing admirably, Mr. Talbot. His lordship is quite pleased. I tell you what,

you must come and stop with us at the The Towers, and—er—we should try and get up some music. We could ask those Miss Malcolms." The Beauty was too happy not to promise all and everything. He was actually "getting engagements," and there are people among the amateurs who go about the country with their little songs, quite delighted when their services are secured. But the musical amateur world is a microcosm in itself.

Mr. Hardman's tactics were highly characteristic, and most people, after a few minutes' conversation found it get round rather to "The Towers," on which the owner would expatiate—then, trapped into a conventional expression of praise, would be surprised by an invitation—"We must have you down at The Towers, if you will do me that honour. We shall find

means to amuse you, or rather, give you the means, and let you amuse yourself. That's my way." As for the host, he openly expressed his dislike. "What on earth made me ask that dreadful man—he is making life a burden. He sticks to me like a burr." It was after dinner, however, when the ladies were gone, that Mr. Hardman was unavoidable. Fixed in his chair, a wooden figure, a white metal cravat about his throat, he dealt in strange pedantic discourse; extracts from newspapers. "I see in the *Times*, my lord;" —"The *Times*, says, my lord," until at last Lord Robert christened him "Old Times," by a happy flight of humour.

At home they were in a flutter of expectation. Mrs. Talbot was nervous and "put out." "He will come, of course, dearest," Livy said.

"Of course he will," said her mother haughtily; "have I not required him. He must."

It was a restless day, dragging its slow length along, when towards evening a strange instinct, which with affection amounts almost to forecast, made her go down to the post-office just before the post came in. There she found her father's letter. It came like a shock upon her. "Then he will stay," she said. "Oh! what dreadful thing is coming!"

A spectator might have smiled; but in their little world every little mist became a cloud. His little flower for the prisoner was more precious than the gardens of a palace. She determined not to tell her mother of the news, and this "not telling" is the favourite resource of gentle minds; some shift or device—anything

that will put off evil news, even a day—the bill-drawer's resource. All that evening the mother made no remark; but when they were going to bed, she said, with a deep sigh, "He will not come. I know he will not."

"O, he will, dearest. I am sure he will. At the last moment he will change, and—"

The mother turned on her. "You know something. What is he to change from? Tell me. You have heard."

Livy, poor little domestic hare, driven to her form, had to give up her letter. Her mother read it, returned it to her calmly, and after a pause, said:

"This is not his doing, some wretched girl has been flattering him. *His* singing, indeed!" but she checked herself; even between the two she felt that old affectionate deception must be carried out.

Meanwhile, at Bindley, the great night came round. Workmen had been turned into the large dining-room, who had erected a platform at the farther end. The large "auditorium," so Mendelssohn Jackson had christened it, was filled up with rows upon rows of chairs. Flowers had been arranged in front by "his lordship's gardener," and the whole had quite a theatrical air. Lord Robert, who was inclined to be merry with the whole, remarked,—"I declare," he reported, "such a set of human steers; such agricultural broadbacks! I was looking at every man's shoulder to see the brand."

About Bindley there *was* rather a cattle country. At eight punctually, his lordship and party entered the hall, and took their places in the "reserved seats" to a round of applause. Then the programmes were

distributed, of which we are enabled to subjoin a copy.

BINDLEY CONCERT HALL.

PATRON—THE LORD BINDLEY.

GRAND CONCERT.

PARTE PRIMA.

"BLACKSMITH'S CHORUS," "Il Trovatore." *Verdi.*
(Compressed by MENDELSSOHN JACKSON.)

DUETT.—Scotch. "Cam hame wi' the Kye."
THE MISSES MALCOLM.

SOLO. "Il Balen" . . . . . *Verdi.*
MR. BAKER.
(Accompanied by MR. MENDELSSOHN JACKSON.)

SOLO. "Bindlina Valse" . . *Mendelssohn Jackson.*
(Aria con variazione, compostà è dedicatà al S. E. il Conde di BINDLEY.)

CORO. "Dal tuo Stellato" . . . . . *Rossini.*

PARTE SECONDA.

CORO. "Blow, Gentle Gales" . . . . . *Bishop.*
Soli by the MISSES MALCOLM, MR. TALBOT, MR. BAKER, and MR. MENDELSSOHN JACKSON.

SOLO. "Good bye, Sweetheart" . . . . . *Bishop.*
MISS GEORGINA MALCOLM.

SOLO.—Piano. "Caprice è Ricambole."
Dédié à son élève, L'Honorable GIUDETTA BINDLEY, par MENDELSSOHN JACKSON.

SOLO. "He Gave one Last and Lingering Smile" *Talbot.*
MR. TALBOT.

DUETT. "Now Glides Our Pretty Bark" . *H. Frebles.*
THE MISSES MALCOLM.

SOLO. "Let me Like a Soldier Fall." . . . *Wallace.*
(Transposed by MENDELSSOHN JACKSON.)
MISS MALCOLM.

GRANDE FINALE.—"GOD SAVE THE QUEEN."

Such was the bill of fare fluttering in everyone's fingers. No wonder it was said, "You could hardly know it from a real concert." From it might be gathered the kind and unsparing way in which Mr. Mendelssohn Jackson had thrown his whole soul into the performance. He carried it all through, arranging, compressing, transposing, fitting everything to everybody. How graceful, too, the little compliments to the noble host and hostess: "things" just struck off at a heat. And after he had remarked at one of the last rehearsals, "Won't do, this; a want of go and rattle. The thing drags somehow:" he then went home, and knocked off the little effects in question.

Talking of the likeness to real concerts, it was the more remarkable when the singing ladies and gentlemen came in a

sort of procession, "exactly like the professionals," rustling in silks, and sat in a row. In this they were carefully drilled by Mr. Mendelssohn Jackson, who made them copy the precedent of the "Norwich Festival" concerts, where he had once assisted as "counter tenor." Thus it is, and by exercise of a little thought, that a sort of realism is imparted to what would otherwise be a loose and incoherent performance. Well might Mr. Jackson say afterwards, that "not for five times five guineas" would he go through the harrassing wear and tear of soul and body undergone during that week.

That sneerer, Lord Robert, was almost ungentlemanly in his remarks on the large share which the director took in the permance. "He *is* the concert. Take it up and down, cross wise, any way, it is all one tune—Jackson." And indeed during

the performance Jackson was everywhere; now beating time; now making a sudden dart from the piano at a piece of music; setting all going, setting all right. Next to this indefatigable actor came the Misses Malcolm, who laboured in the heats and dews, and "worked like horses." Amazing was it to see their self-possession before that audience, their boldness in standing up well to the front, their perfect coolness and *aplomb*. The courage of women is indeed truer courage than that of men. The two sisters came forward smiling, clad the same, each with a pink scarf garterwise across their chests, to sing their piquant Scotch duett. Who did not recal the words?—

"The night is braw and bonnie,
The moon is shining clear,
And I gae forth sae gaily,
For my laddie is near,
For my laddie is near."

The arch way in which they nodded and looked over their shoulders was truly piquant, and led to a rapturous encore. The spirit, too, with which Miss Malcolm gave her dashing song, "Let me like a Soldier fall," at the end waving her music as if it was a sword, led to a deserved recal. As for Mendelssohn Jackson's own little "things," how he set down the music stand, threw open the piano, wheeled it to an angle, drew in his chair, looked up to the ceiling a moment in thought, as if to recover lost inspiration; such tokens of genius were all noted and admired. But we all know how Mendelssohn Jackson and his brethren behave on such occasions.

The first chord "dug" vigorously into the clay of the piano; the gay canter to the top; the pause; the gentle riding

motion of the figure; the sweetly smiling and bowing in pleasant recognition to the back of his hands as they go through their labour; their leaps into the air; their clearing of each other, like clowns on all fours, who are fond of going over each other in this way: have we not seen this at a hundred concerts of more pretension than the Bindley one? But we are approaching the event of the night.

Pleased as they had been, that rustic audience had been instructed that the noble host had something in reserve, with which he desired they should be far more pleased. "The new tenor!" How that sound fluttered about.

"They are asking which is the new tenor; to point him out; and of course I did," said Mrs. Labouchere, coming up to him about five minutes before his song.

He was sitting in "the green room" —so called—not nervous, but in a dreaming state of excitement.

"You will do it admirably, I see," she went on; "and if you bring the house down, I shall claim some share in the credit. I think it was I who urged you—urged you—well, on your wild career."

"Indeed, yes," said the Beauty, warmly. "But for you I should not be here now."

A curious smile answered and encouraged him.

"You have been very kind and good, and taken much trouble with me. *Indeed*, Mrs. Labouchere, I shall not forget it."

At such and at kindred moments—as during an amateur play—we can take the whole world to our bosom. Every one is "my dear boy" or girl, and a certain *épanchement de cœur* is pardonable. There

was even a tremble in the Beauty's voice as he spoke. She looked majestic and splendid, in velvet and diamonds; haughty as Grisi in "Norma;" despising the whole thing, save the one solitary portion in which she had interested herself.

"I have come from my room solely to hear you sing," she went on, "I feel such a restless interest in it. There, here comes that man to tell you all is ready. Now, courage. *Think of me* at your first bar."

It was Mr. Jackson tramping in, "Where's Mr. Talbot? Where's your song? Audience is waiting. Come." And taking it up, he led the way.

When the Bindley audience saw the soft features, the divided black hair, and the glossy, oiled moustache of the Beauty, his faultless and lady-like linen, and even inhaled the cloud of perfume that floated be

fore him, they were filled with enthusiasm, and greeted the interesting performer with a round of enthusiastic applause. It was really the same as when, after town profusely "billed" and newspaper-paragraphed, and a shower of puffs, and talk and whispers, and suggested disappointment, we have seen, and often seen, the well-heralded artist enter on the platform. Then we see, as it were, bills and puffs and whispers all concentrated in the bowing figure before us, and it becomes heroic. So was it with the Beauty. He was the hero of the night.

Mendelssohn Jackson, after a few careless chords, struck into the symphony, playing the air with intense expression, only drawing it out to a degree that made the Beauty uncomfortable. Then the Beauty began, faltering a little at first,

but getting courage. His voice was clear and tender, though, like that of conscience, "a still, small one." The teaching and tutoring of Mendelssohn Jackson, half contemptuous, had not been thrown away. He really gave a gentlemanlike, inoffensive, and in parts, effective rendering of the famous ballad; and when, after hovering suspended over the edge, for the prescribed time—

"One last and lin-G'RING . . . ."

he finally leaped and lighted on his feet, in the word "SMILE," on which he "died off" softly and sadly, down came a volley of applause, with an irresistible demand for an encore; for which, indeed, the signal came from his lordship, who was seen smiling, pleased, and delighted, and heard to whisper to his neighbour, "I

knew he'd do." Club friends in town wondered afterwards as they heard Bindley laying down the law on musical matters, with a very critical air; a person who up to that had about as much music in him as "a carpenter's saw in good work." It was a sweet and most delightful moment! — paradisal! — something to have dreams of, something that might never come back again.

So it seemed to him that night when the concert was over, when he was receiving the gentle spray of compliments showered on him, figure succeeding figure. "Such a treat, Mr. Talbot." "Such a charming voice." One such note kept pouring into his ear.

"I cannot tell you the effect produced; everybody is talking of it. They should give *me* a testimonial, surely. Ah, if I

had only known you long ago! What time wasted, what glories lost! Here you are a public man. A change, indeed, from the hermit-like life you have been leading. How many years now?"

"Indeed, it is a long, long time," said the Beauty.

"I often think how many men of genius are thus forced to live a mole-like existence—underground, as it were. It is not right—it should not be—it is wasting the precious blessings of heaven. Be a monk, if you please; but then do it regularly: choose your convent, and get professed. But do not act after this lay fashion," said Mrs. Labouchere.

Strange thoughts were flitting through the Beauty's mind. Yes, he had led a curious, unsatisfactory life. How was it that he was so misunderstood at home?

Here, the very first opportunity of his enlargement, he was raised to the pinnacle of social celebrity.

Now comes up Lord Bindley, rather excited.

"My dear Talbot, a word with you; we must not let this drop. Having found a mine—ha, ha!—I am not going to let it go unworked. I have a royalty in you, my dear fellow — ha, ha! See, we are going to repeat this concert; it has been really such a great success, and you are re-engaged for Wednesday. So no thoughts of going home."

The Beauty's cheeks flushed with pleasure.

"See what it is to become a public man," said Mrs. Labouchere. "Publicity has its duties as well as its rights. There will be no escaping from this."

The Beauty began excuses, but they would not be listened to. It was charming — delightful — too exquisite. Kindly faces on all sides crowding round; all pressing, entreating — *imploring*, was it? —that he should remain. What could he do, a public man? In his place, what would any one do? It was wrung from him: he would see in the morning. He would do what he could. Sweet, sweetest night!

CHAPTER VI.

UNDECIDED.

A WEARY day, though, for the two ladies far away. It drew on heavily from morn till midday, from midday till dusk, still with hopes that he would at last return. They clung to that hope, as everyone does in that wonderful way for which there is no analogy — from the sentenced criminal downwards. At last it grew dark, and drew on to the hour when the concert was beginning. They did not venture on the step of sending the carriage to the station, for they knew a porter could be sent up to the house for it. But

the long night dragged on; all Livy's little shifts and devices in the way of excuse or defence of the culprit, broke down.

"You don't think," said her mother, almost passionately, "that I mind his staying a day, or days even, at any country house? I am not such a foolish creature. But I know what this means—of what it is the certain beginning. His poor head has been turned by some girl's praise. You see how he spoke of his song."

"Indeed, no," said Livy, warmly; "he will tell the whole thing to us to-morrow morning. You will see, dear. Oh, it is a trifle—not worth thinking of; fifty gentlemen would do the same. When he comes in the morning—"

"Come! Oh, yes, he must come in the morning. But who knows?"

Livy looked a little wild at this supposition, and it attended her to her room that night, and waited on her during the night, like an ugly sight. What if he should not come in the morning?

This may all seem ludicrous enough—a social puddle in a storm; but from these two hearts proceeded two fibres that joined the Beauty's noble figure, and which any motion of his caused to vibrate, and almost to jangle.

In the morning—a Sunday morning—there was but the one train by which he could arrive, about noon. It was an uneasy church time, and when it was over Livy's ponies were got out, and trotted her down to the station. But the train came, and the Beauty, as we know, was not in it. From her seat, with fluttering heart, she saw the doors open and flap,

and give up their passenger or two, and the train move on. She saw it was not the Beauty that was left, and her soul sank. This was alarming; and, half terrified, she turned her ponies away from the house, for she had not courage to face her mother. On the road she saw her lover and worshipper coming gaily along. His face fell also.

"I was certain he would come to-day. What can be over him?"

(He, too, had been drawn into the little microcosm)

"But what are we to do?" she cried. "I cannot go back with this news."

The young man paused a few seconds.

"I was going to propose something, only he might not like it. Here is rather an important letter come in for my father, which he ought to see at once. I was

about sending a special messenger; but—"

"O, if you would—the very thing!" she cried eagerly, leaping to his meaning. "Do go quick, and speak to him. Tell him he must return to us—or find out the reason. But don't—don't hurt his pride, or let him think—"

"I understand; leave it to me."

"She is not well, and is so nervous always, that this is certain—"

"I understand," he said again. "You will find me a willing and clever ambassador. Leave it to me. I am just going to the train, and shall be home late to-night."

At Bindley that morning, there was quite a clatter of delighted talk and congratulation. Bindley had, indeed, up to this time been a kind of old-fashioned

house—"behind the time," and with a bad name through the country, as being "the most stupid place going;" and the gala was a sort of surprise and delight. This feeling was duly quickened by the indefatigable Wood's, who had been, as it were, in the saddle for four and twenty hours. They were like the man in the French theatre, who gets up a *claque* for his wife, appears on the first tier at the back of a box, with an obstreperous "Bravo!" and vigorous fusilade of clapping, then hurries away higher, and repeats his applause. It was impossible to resist the zeal of these Woods; and every one was convinced that this had been an almost national success, and should be in the *Times*.

Mr. Talbot came down from the delightful seventh heaven. Already the hum-

drums of domestic life, the poor rusticity of the women—seemed very tedious and fretting. People ought to take a larger and wholesome view. He seemed to regard them more as a statesman might a nursery and its little commotions, such as Master Jackey's having stolen a pot of jam. But what came back on him oftenest was that speech of his true friend, Mrs. Labouchere, whose kindness and encouragement he should never forget. A generous, clever woman: clever, because she had seized on his true character; generous, because she had the magnanimity to forget the past. It is surprising once a bad step has been taken, how the next impulse is not to palliate its effect, but, with a sort of desperation, to widen the breach.

The feeling is, in vulgar phrase, "In

for a penny, in for a pound;" and so the Beauty, shutting his eyes, as it were, found it impossible to resist the sweet pressure put upon him, and thought it best to leave things as they were. "Time enough to-morrow to write to 'them.'" For, alas! such was the shape they were taking for him—a sort of "party," "they,"—those who were keeping him down in obscurity.

It was a sunshiny winter's morning, and these thoughts came floating on him as he sat in the church, with the whole distinguished party from Bindley. Did he fancy that the soft glances of the young girls were stealing over the edges of their books to have a secret gaze at the hero of last night? He felt as if it was his home. When he returned, he found his way to the "concert hall," still in the

pleasant disorder of last night—chairs disarranged, bills strewn about, music all scattered. There was where he stood and sang. Someone fluttering by, stopped and looked in.

"It was a very pleasant night—something to think of," said she—it was Mrs. Labouchere.

He answered, with enthusiasm,—

"O, was it not charming?"

"But you must stay for Wednesday. There is to be a new programme. You will have to practise. Will you be once more advised by me? Though, indeed, I have no reason to advise. I daresay you think poorly of me for being so forgetful."

"How?" he asked. "O, Mrs. Talbot!"

"I have lost my poor husband: she had nearly made me lose him once before.

Did she ever tell you the device which she used to shipwreck my happiness? Not likely, I should think."

"No, indeed," said the Beauty, looking at her with interest; "but we must forget all that. We must be very intimate in future. Leave it to me. She is very sensible; or even if she is not inclined, you and I are great friends. O yes, we must see a great deal of you."

She laughed.

"O, *we* must, must we? Are you certain of that? Take care you are not going beyond your powers. You know you can only speak for one; and as for *me*, she has reasons for not liking me. She cannot easily forget *that*, and she will not let you forget it. You must obey, Mr. Talbot."

She left him with a sort of scornful smile.

The Beauty, much put out, determined he would not write that day.

In the evening, just before dinner, a carriage drove up, and his lordship came to look for Mr. Hardman.

"Mr. Hardman,"—O, that he would say "Hardman!" but he never would—"your son has come with some papers, and wishes to see you. He seems a nice young fellow. I have asked him to dine with us."

"O dear, no, my lord, no need," said the other, never relishing the distribution of common blessings to his own family; a protest of which his host took no notice.

The father and son met and transacted the business.

"Here, you," said the father, "you need not be hanging on here. You can't stay on that sort of invitation."

"But he has made it such a point, father—and I have agreed."

"Overrunning the place in this way! Better send for all the servants, and quarter my family here at once."

There was other business, too, the youth would like to have introduced, but he saw that the humour his father was in would not admit of it. However, this was a reason to make him yield to what was wished.

He at once sought Mr. Talbot, and found him at the piano by himself "composing." A brilliant idea had struck him: he would like to put it into shape. How charming would it be to have an entirely new song, "composed for the occasion"—and again, "words *selected* by Mrs. Labouchere"—the whole "respectfully inscribed to the Lord Bindley." He was in a fever till he put it in execution. What

a surprise and delight for the crowd! Mrs. Labouchere, in her languid contemptuous way, did select: that is, took down one of the old rose-silk-bound annuals for which our grandfathers paid their guinea cheerfully—"Amulet," "Charm," "Bijou," and the rest—and laid her finger at random on one of Milkton Monsey's lyrics—then, alas! a curly-headed darling, writing with a jewelled pen,

"Yes, his was love sincere and true."

Young Hardman approached him with an almost tender reverence. He saw him now in quite a different light. He was awe-stricken at the important labours of his future father.

"O, how d'ye do," the Beauty said, fretfully. "Beg pardon, I must finish

this phrase." And he wrote it down on the music paper, first trying the chords. This was the Beauty's fashion of composition.

"I saw them," said the young man, nervously, "this morning."

"They?—who? O, yes," said the Beauty, turning to his music paper.

"They were so dreadfully disappointed yesterday; and they had such a splendid present waiting. Miss Olivia saved up her money."

"O, it couldn't be," said the other; "out of the question. One has duties to one's host. They can't understand the thing. One must give and take."

"Ah, yes, to be sure. But, now, Mr. Talbot, I can go back and tell them you shall be home to-morrow."

"Indeed you cannot. Never was any

one so worried. There is another concert on Wednesday, and I *must* wait."

"O, you could not! They will be so hurt. I know she will be so anxious—and you promised them, and it will look so like a slight. You love them, as I know, and would not wound them. I assure you Mrs. Talbot feels very acutely, and," added young Mr. Hardman, artfully, seeing the other's hesitation, "I don't know what she may do."

A vision rose before the alarmed Beauty of her driving up to fetch him. In that case he knew he could make no resistance: not all the Mrs. Laboucheres and Lord Bindleys in the world could save him. But then came the vision of the delightful and entrancing night to be repeated. It was too seductive, and he could not

give it up. It was unfair, unreasonable to ask him. He said, suddenly—

"O, I can't do it, really; and I am glad you have come, as you will see yourself how things stand here. Ladies can't understand. I'm really not a child, to come back to the day and hour, and all that sort of thing. So tell them, please, I'll be back on Thursday. And see here, now, Hardman, you are a reasonable fellow, and see that the thing can't be done—don't you?"

It was a temptation for the young man. A little adhesion here would have forwarded his interests. But he answered—

"Of course, I have no business to interfere; but I *do* think they will be much hurt if you do not go back."

Going out to see after his carriage, he met Lord Bindley. That nobleman, who

thought him a cheerful, pleasant fellow, and a strange contrast to his father, took him to show him the place. Towards dinner time, when the young fellow had gone, his lordship was heard asking for "Talbot." Aide-de-camp Wood found him speedily.

"See here, Talbot," said his lordship, "we must try and get on without you. It isn't fair to keep you here, and it mustn't be."

The Beauty was so confounded that he knew not what to answer.

"Mustn't be," he repeated. "Yes, we must turn you out—send you home to Mrs. Talbot. I'm not about to come between man and wife. And, indeed, if I had known, I shouldn't have kept you even for the other night."

The Beauty was a gentleman born and

bred, and with all his folly had a certain tact.

"By all means, Lord Bindley, since you wish. I was only staying to help your concert. I shall go to-morrow."

"O, I don't mean that, my dear Talbot, and we are all so much obliged to you. But I think, you know, it would be better on the whole. A great disappointment to us all."

Lord Bindley was himself rather a weak nobleman, as, indeed, his violent taking up of that music might imply. That evening Mrs. Labouchere came to him. "My dear lord," she said; "what is this we hear? You are letting our Beauty go."

"O yes," said he, with mystery, "it is quite proper, and all that. You see, his wife does not quite like it, and he has

been playing truant. It is not right, you know, to keep a husband from his wife."

"Out of France. Yes. But the poor concert. What a *fiasco!*"

"A *fiasco*, eh? No. We shall do famously. Mendelssohn Jackson says he knows of another tenor, far better."

"Of course, a thousand far better. By-the-way, I suppose it was that boy who came with the story; he is in love with our Beauty's daughter. Now, don't you see, my lord? Wheels within wheels. He knew what he was about, that artless, ingenuous youth."

Even the hint of being taken in is not agreeable. Lord Bindley was put out.

"Then the concert—" she went on; "it is most unfortunate. The country people, the second relay who are coming, will, of course, have the notion that they

were to hear a prodigy—a human dying swan—a Rubini for nothing. Their disappointment will be great. He has a nice voice; but they will magnify him."

His lordship looked irresolute. "It is very annoying and provoking," he said.

Mrs. Labouchere went on.

"He is dying to stay. It is rather absurd the poor creature cannot amuse himself for two or three days, and in this harmless way. It is all very innocent. Bindley will not corrupt him."

Lord Bindley laughed. The other was but a spasmodic emotion; he was sorry afterwards that he had given way to it. The concert, in his mind, had assumed the dimensions of something grand, and even exhibition-like. The cares of dinner then supervened. After that meal had been transacted, he came up to her and said,

"I have a little plan of my own. We shall keep Talbot, and make him sing at the concert."

The lady wondered. Lord Bindley was not accounted a very bright nobleman. This was probably what the Americans would call some "foolish scare," and she dismissed it. The Beauty was very gloomy and depressed all that night, as if ordered for execution. His dream was over, his happy furlough gone for ever. He was oppressed and ill-treated. He was under sentence, as it were. Lord Bindley had always made it a point to be ecclesiastical when he had company, and read prayers on Sunday mellifluously, as though he had been ordained. He took the Beauty aside after these evening offices, and said:

"My dear Talbot, I hope you will stay with us. I make it a point. I tell you

what, I am going up to town to-morrow, and shall take Mrs. Talbot on my way, and arrange the whole with her. I know she will be reasonable, and a few words with her will settle the whole business."

A sparkle came into the Beauty's eye. That was indeed like business. That would compose matters. She could not, as he expected, resist that aristocratic influence. Later, he met Mrs. Labouchere: but she said not a word, looking at him with a sort of amused glance, which made him feel quite uncomfortable. Perhaps he had fallen low in her estimation. When he met her again, he said:

"You have heard how happily everything has been arranged."

"No," she said, indifferently, "I hear so much."

"I mean about Lord Bindley's going to town."

"O, and see your people, and *get you leave.* Well, it sounds strangely."

"Not *that,* you always say that; no, just to speak to them."

There was a look of contempt on her face. "I would rather anything than that. It is too humiliating. But of course it sounds strange, my interfering. Still, I am sorry for the whole thing. If you had been advised by me—even if you felt bound to be so nice about staying a day or two—there was a different plan of going about it, which even my poor wits could have helped you to."

The Beauty looked at her eagerly. "O tell me, tell me!" he said.

"Would you follow it, if I told you?" she said. "No. Besides, really it would

sound strange, supplying you with a plan against your wife, in the face of all law and morals."

"Yes," he said; "but when they turn against me — and so many years as I have——"

"Ah, there it is; so many years you have been good and obedient and docile, and here, at the eleventh hour, or rather, at five minutes to twelve, you wish to throw off the yoke. It is only reasonable they should be astonished. No, no; you have put yourself into Lord Bindley's hands, and we had best leave you there."

CHAPTER VII.

UNEXPECTED VISITORS.

NEVER were people so surprised as Mrs. Talbot and our Livy, when a card was brought in, with his lordship's name upon it. The affectionate creatures first thought that something dreadful had happened to their dear Beauty, and that this ambassador had come to break the news to them. His smiling face reassured them, and he at once opened his business.

"I want you, Mrs. Talbot," he said, "to come to us—you and your daughter. It will give us the greatest pleasure. Your father and I were great friends. I can

promise you music, the like of which, they tell me, cannot be matched by amateurs in the three kingdoms. I assure you the concert has made quite a sensation; and, I am told, a *critique* will be in the *Court Journal.* O, you must come."

The artful peer, it will be seen, said nothing of the motive for this invitation, or of the end to which it was to be the means.

Livy was enchanted at the notion, especially as she was told that "he hoped to have a very nice, off-hand young fellow—son of that Hardman over there, but a very different sort of character."

His lordship was very pressing indeed: Mrs. Talbot listened coldly. She was engaged — she was busy — she could do nothing. "And, indeed, Lord Bindley, I wish you would send me home my

foolish husband. I am not well, and you are demoralising him there. Surely Lord Bindley does not believe he has found a Mario in our poor Beauty, who has never learned a note ?"

"Well—er—I don't know; but they all say so. And a lady there, who is one of the most accomplished musicians of the day—you must have heard of her, a daughter of that Hardman——"

"Daughter of that Hardman!" she repeated, half rising. "Do you mean to tell me that *she* is there ?"

"Yes; Mrs. Labouchere. Very great gifts! But what is the matter ?"

Mrs. Talbot remained, her eyes fixed on the ground, while his lordship expatiated on the charms and attractions of his guest. Mrs. Talbot had not forgotten her old training. A rush of ideas was pouring in

upon her; and she was only thinking what she could do, and, without abruptness change her front. The news overwhelmed her; but no one could see any change in her face.

"It is so tempting," she said; "and it is very hard to resist such inducements. Our poor girl, too, gets so little amusement. I should *like* to go."

She was irresolute. The lord thought this was due to his skilful way of putting the matter, and pressed it warmly. A reluctant consent was wrung from her, on one condition. It must be kept a secret. She had a reason. This was agreed to, and his lordship departed.

When he was gone, Livy was confounded by the wild and tragic look that had come into her mother's face.

"I knew it would come to this. I had

an instinct that that vile woman was at the bottom of it. The poor creature had not wit enough to compass such a thing himself. O Heavens! This is too much!"

"But who, dearest?" said the daughter.

"Who? That woman—that Hardman woman! The mill hand! Born in a mill, as I believe she was! How dare she do it? I knew it; I had a presentiment. This low, mean soul, has treasured up the grudge; and she is determined to spite me in this way. Yes, I see it all. It is nothing new: and you are a child, Livy, and can't understand to what lengths women of this sort will go."

Livy was aghast at this vaticination.

"What *are* we to do?" she said.

"Do!" said her mother. "Why meet, defeat her, crush her, as you will see me do. Though I have left off that for years,

I have not forgotten my old ways. I have met others before her, and twice as spiteful and clever, and left them to rue the day they thought of hurting me!"

That night Livy's sleep was troubled, and for the first time she had a sort of glimpse of what a cold, cruel, terrible place the world was.

On the Tuesday evening there was to be a fresh rehearsal for this wonderful concert, which really, from the treatment it is receiving, seems magnifying into an almost Homeric event. Again the Hall was crowded with obsequious retainers, who, in truth, were growing a little wearied with an entertainment that was above their level, as it might be thought by the performers.

Even the farm labourers — the men about the stables — were required to

attend, in Sunday suit, by special "favour" of his lordship.

"I think," he said, benevolently, "we should not draw the line too close; and I am determined to give those poor fellows about the farmyard a chance of hearing some good music. No, I am none of your feudal tyrants."

Hodge and his friends had a miserable night—thought very poorly of the singing, and had often heard better at the alehouse.

It was about the beginning of the second part that the gate bell was heard to clang afar off, and Lord Bindley seen to hurry out to "meet guests." The singers looked at each other with complacency. Here were fresh witnesses, hurrying to admire. It was all fish to their vain net. The Beauty felt the same

excitement, and, after an interval, was getting ready for his new song, composed specially for the occasion. These poor vocal ostriches, who have their bill firmly in the sand, actually endow the more vulgar with intellect, criticism, and a relish, far above even their own level.

The previous song was finishing—"a poor thing, which should never have been allowed into the programme"—and Mr. Talbot was looking down the crowded room, when he noticed a rustle and confusion at the door. It was the host ushering in the new guests. Could he believe his eyes—his senses? What! Mrs. Talbot, and his daughter Olivia!

They to come, too! And what did it mean? He was bewildered, confounded; and when he went out to get his music,

he met Mrs. Labouchere, with a flushed cheek, stern eye, and lip of scorn.

"The naughty boy would not go home to school, so mamma had to come and fetch him! It is *rather* hard on you."

It *was*, he felt, going too far: and he went out with Mendelssohn Jackson, to sing the new song, composed in honour of the occasion. Down below, among the faces, he saw his wife's—cold, and but half interested; but Livy's was fixed on his with an absorbed interest and adoration. That devoted face attracted the attention of many more besides her father, and interested them, too. He was "put out." He felt it as an intolerable slavery, so degrading, so mean; what must they all think of him? *Even Mrs. Labouchere pitying his subjection!* There was some-

thing ludicrous in it. They were fools, and wicked, and deserved a lesson. Alas! for the new song; under such conditions it was an utter failure. Mendelssohn Jackson "putting him in" largely, adding "ridiculous accompaniments" and flourishes and comments, *sotto voce*, "running wild," "keep yourself in,"—"steady there!" It was quite a *fiasco;* in fact, he "broke down," and Lord Bindley was much annoyed.

"I think," said Mendelssohn Jackson, in the "green room" "we had better go back to the 'Long-drawn Smile.' It's safer, of the two. If you consulted me, I'd take 'My Pretty Jane' or something of that kidney; but this last business—no. Rather too loose and rambling—ground gives under us here and there, you see." Mr. Jackson knew perfectly well the name

of our Beauty's song; but he chose thus to misdescribe it.

The Beauty met his relations with that "put out" manner which he could not disguise before company. "So you are come!" he said, according to the unmeaning formula of people who know not what to say. He really did not know what to say or to think; but a sort of hopelessness and despair of defending himself took possession of him.

"You are not in voice to-night," she said, gaily. "You will sing better at the concert, dear. We have come some distance to hear you."

This seemed to say he was to be allowed to remain.

Great curiosity was among the guests as to these new arrivals. Louisa Mary, Countess of Seaman, knew all about her,

in that wonderful way in which certain women of rank "make up," and make out, about any one connected with their order. It is like a book collector, and the books he has never read. Mrs. Talbot was a veteran in fields in which she herself had fought. The Ladies Mariner came about Livy with very much the cold approaches of fishes.

The meeting of the two ladies conveyed nothing to any one present. Do what she would, Mrs. Labouchere found that it would take the shape of her being brought to Mrs. Talbot. The latter had become her old self again; one of the stately band, with a commanding and assured manner there was no resisting. The host at once gave her this place; at once she seemed to combine with the other great dames in a sort of "House of Ladies" in

the place. Her manner was haughty, and even genteelly scoffing, and Mrs. Labouchere fancied she heard the words of depreciation.

"Neighbours, you know," and the tone seemed to convey that that local relation obliged a certain sort of acquaintance.

"You are going to stay in this country, I suppose?" she said; "or were you stopping in France? I forget. I did hear something."

"My brother knows everything about me. I believe he has been with you every day during this last week." This was a thrust back.

"All the officers make their way to our house," said Mrs. Talbot, to "Louisa Mary," as if explaining. "Mr. Talbot likes to see them. By the way, I hear

they have been pressing him to sing—exhibit himself before the whole country. Why, it's not fair to him; he has only a small drawing-room voice."

Lord Bindley grew uneasy. He was always impressed by the last speaker, or last comer.

"He did very well, though; very fairly, so they said."

"O! a rustic audience is not *difficile*."

"It is curious," said Mrs. Labouchere, smiling; "that those who heard the concert should have been pleased: while those who were absent, and heard nothing, condemn the performance. Poor Mr. Talbot! It is very hard on him."

She looked round with a smile, for support. But her faithful backers, "the men," were not there; the cold, haughty stare of the great ladies, understanding

nothing, wondering coldly, shut off sympathy. The expression was reflected on to Lord Bindley's face who looked only half pleased. "Louisa Mary" then says calmly, as if wishing to change the subject, "Have you heard of the Longs of Eaton, lately?" It will not do; no boldness, courage, wit, sarcasm, can ever fight against such combination. Most curious, too, was the attitude taken by Mrs. Talbot, the calm air of superiority and contempt, so that Lord Bindley at once invested her with the ensign of musical criticism, and began to say, "You think so? Now, tell me, do you think we are right in that?"

It was impossible, too, not to notice the change in the Beauty since this unlucky arrival—as one of the men said, "It was as though he had had his ears

cropped." He seemed to have lost his independent way, and appeared to slink about in a very abject manner, indeed. It had all the look as if he had been fetched away, and having presumed on the indulgence allowed him, was now to be punished. His wife still pursued her fashion of being amused at the Beauty's coming before the public. "So it is to be that new composition. Better keep to your old friend, the 'Lingering Smile.'"

"Yes, yes," said one of the gentlemen, "as he has lingered so long, he may as well finish with it."

"Ha, ha!" the host said, innocently. "Very good; but I think it wasn't fair of Mrs. Talbot to come for you in this way. Eh, Mrs. Labouchere?"

"It certainly has an odd look," that

lady answered. "But, Mr. Talbot is, of course, the proper judge of that."

"O, we are not going to turn Lord Bindley's little joke into a serious matter: but that new song, or composition, will not do. If you *must* be a public singer, dear, let us have what you know something about. I could not bear to see you break down, dear."

"There is no talk of breaking down," he said, pettishly. "You weren't here; you didn't hear me, and how well it went off. There is no use making a fuss about the thing. They say it's the best thing I have ever done."

"They say! What, the press — the critics? Who, dear?"

"Nonsense; you know what I mean. Here's Mrs. Labouchere thinks so, and she's an excellent judge."

"You will have to submit to the real judge, dear—the public. Seriously, you must not think of it, even if you get a testimonial in writing as to its merits."

"No, no, Talbot," said his lordship, firmly; "we can run no risks. We shall have the lingering—what-do-ye call it?—in the bills."

Mrs. Talbot looked with calm triumph at her enemy.

"Come, Mr. Talbot," said the latter; "come, at all events, and practise. I am ready for my duty, and believe in the new song."

She went out, and the Beauty followed her with alacrity.

"This is very sad," she said to him, as they went along the corridor; "and seems to be a sort of change. I am very

sorry for it, and that our pleasant little relations are to be at an end."

"O, no! I hope not. It *is* very hard. Everything was going on so nicely."

"O, yes," she said; "it won't do now. Somehow it seems we have all lost the old spirit; there is a sort of restraint come on us."

"O, it is such nonsense and folly. Everything turned into a fuss, and to be made ridiculous, too, in this way. You heard Lord Bindley—'fetched away,' indeed!"

"Yes, I felt for you. It is foolish, magnifying things into undue importance. A little song, too! I am sure it has lessened all your confidence, and that you will fail before the audience, as you did the other night."

"Exactly—exactly what I feel. It has

taken away the pleasant spirit I had. I declare, I am quite put out."

"Yes, I felt for you," she repeated, slowly. "And you know — that is, I would wish you to think—that I am your friend, and take an interest in you. I did not know you before this visit. I own I mistook you. I now see that you have real gifts, real talent; and I think it is a pity that you should not use them for the amusement of your friends."

The Beauty coloured; it was long since he had been spoken to in words of such genuine compliment.

"O, I am so glad you think that, and I feel your kindness so much."

"Not at all—and for that reason I should feel for you if you were humiliated before people. It is unnecessary. Where is the use of it?" she went on, warmly.

"My husband, Colonel Labouchere, was the most generous and upright of men—though I felt that I had more cleverness, as it was called, and could have commanded him, still I had such a pride and respect for him, that I could only think of making him respected by every one else. I could not think that levelling him, or making him cheap before people, was raising myself. The more I looked up to him, and made others look up to him, the more I was adding to my own *prestige*. This is the sensible view, and the only affectionate view."

He was about to answer, when they heard a voice at the door.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SKIRMISH.

"O, THERE you are, Beauty dear! I want to speak to you."

Mrs. Labouchere looked round from the piano, and laughed. "That is a female name. I declare I was near answering to it."

"It is absurd!" he said, angrily; "calling a man such ridiculous names. What is it, now? I am practising."

"Never mind; I have something more important than the singing. Come, dear, don't keep me, please."

The Beauty could not resist, and moved towards the door.

"Charming, charming!" said Mrs. Labouchere; "*there* is docility, *there* is obedience! You should publish your receipt, Mrs. Talbot."

The Beauty stopped, irresolute and pettish. "Obedience, indeed! it is ridiculous. See what is thought of it by other people—really making me so ridiculous. Just let me finish, and do go away."

Mrs. Talbot came forward steadily, put her arm in his, secured him, and looking up into his face with a most coquettish air, said,

"O, you will come with me, I know, dear. Really, something important—letters to show you. Come!"

This bait attracted him, and he went with her.

"I shall be back in a moment, Mrs. Labouchere," he said.

Along the corridor Mrs. Talbot said not a word. Once in her own room, she closed the door sharply, left him standing, and drawing back to the window; gazed at him with a steady look of scorn, that made him quail.

"*So this* is what you are about!" she said, with contempt. "O, you child! Once away from your mamma and nurses, these are the follies you go after!"

"No follies," he said, heatedly. "Just what other men do. It's getting too bad; I'm not a child, and won't be. Nurses, indeed!"

"There, dear. What sensible man ever had to protest that he was not a child? But I see I have just come in time to

save you from more follies. Your poor head is turned, I believe, with this little song of yours. Do behave properly. Think of any married man that you know. *They* consider they have retired. What do they care for a little foolish applause? Why, one would think from your writing, you had made a successful speech in parliament."—Alas, Mrs. Talbot!—"But I would advise you to reflect whether you will not make some failure very mortifying to us all. You know, Lord Bindley would never forgive us, to say nothing of the criticism, and the ridicule."

The Beauty glowed and fumed. "Yes, and whose fault is it? I sang beautifully the other night, and every one was delighted, and enchanted, until you came after me—to fetch me to school—as they say—"

"Who say?"

"They all say it; I might as well be a little child. How *can* I sing?—it has made me all nervous and uncertain, and you know the least thing that way affects it. And I can see that you have been going on to Lord Bindley, too, for his manner is quite changed to me. And I tell you what," said the Beauty, with the tone and manner of a child that was smashing its toys to spite its parents, "I'll just throw the whole thing up. There! I will."

"That would be foolish, dear; but anything is better than a *fiasco*—"

"O, it is very fine talking," went on the Beauty, glowing with excitement; "it is very well. I am putting up with too much, and they all say it's becoming ridiculous, and it musn't go on."

"Musn't go on! Well, sing with all my heart, and we shall see."

"Yes, I know you would like to see. I'm not quite a Russian what-d'ye-call it, under your thumb, as Mrs. Labouchere said."

"O, she said that, did she? I am sure, dear, it was a wonderful sentiment."

"No, I know you don't like her," he went on, spitefully longing to revenge himself somehow. "There are reasons for that—she's a clever woman. She knows another reason for your coming here, though one would think you had enough of meddling with her."

The fine lady's Chalon cheek coloured. She felt that she must strike with vigour, and she knew his nature well enough. It was like going to a cupboard for a birch.

"Don't speak to me in that way," she said, looking at him steadily, "and above all, don't forget your invariably gentlemanly manners. You are whining like a child. You, a married man with a grown-up daughter, and your head overset on account of your little song! Why, if you had been in parliament and made a brilliant speech, like Mr. Horner, or carried a case at the bar—but instead, you have sung a little ballad before a few villagers! And this emboldens you to insult me. Stay on here as long as you please—sing until you tire them out. I shall certainly wait, as I intended, to hear the result."

"I shan't sing a note of it. You've settled that. Not a note, if I was to die for it! If I did, you would make me break down."

"Do just as you like, dear. I only

think of yourself; I can see even the men here are amused, and have their joke about the new tenor."

Foolish woman! The weak mind of the Beauty treasured up all these words; they scared his very heart. He knew there was truth in them; but he could not forget the mortification. A hundred little womanish projects of revenge entered his brain—a longing to mortify *her* in some way. The other hints of Mrs. Labouchere seemed now to gain confirmation. This was mere "treatment of him as a child." Long after, when certain events had taken place, which added many a line to the delicate Chalon face—lines that defied all the smooth trowellings of art—when she was thinking herself the most wretched creature on the face of the earth, she ought to have turned her eyes backward

to this day, and to that poor and unfruitful triumph over him.

He left the room. Then her face fell. "I must get him away from this at once. He quoted some of that low woman's speeches. The mean artful creature she is, she has not forgotten the way in which I set her down. No wonder; for I do hate her; and, if I could send him away, would like nothing more than to stay on here, and trample on her every day and every hour."

She could do that, however. Mr. Hardman was still there, but going away on the morrow, having at last found the unwelcome truth forced upon him that he was not to be of *that* company. Yet he thought he saw a glimpse of sunshine. The great ladies were talking eagerly together at lunch over a plan they were

planning. "Louisa Mary," the Countess, meagre and stingy for all her rank, was engaged in some bazaar—their share of which was to be carried out on the most thrifty principles, involving, also, predatory calls upon their neighbours.

It was to be down at Seaman—a charity for a certain orphanage, into which a deal of worsted and anti-macassars entered, the Ladies Mariner doing a vast deal of captaincy over the unhappy little orphans before visitors, making them redound to their own honour and glory. The countess introduced this subject as a sort of great public duty, and made a kind of charity sermon, dwelling on the meritoriousness of the good object. It was duly enlarged on, as if it was some political measure; and the august lady described her hopes and chances.

Mrs. Talbot seemed to have entered into it already with spirit, and was engaged for contributions, co-operation, &c. The other guests listened, awed, as these plans were shadowed forth; and Lord Robert volunteered to be auctioneer at the close of the performance, and knock down all the lots to the highest bidder of the young ladies.

Mr. Hardman had been listening restlessly, his cold, hard face lighting up with eager look. At last he cleared his throat—

"I think, my lady," he said, after lunch was over, "we should all be glad to give some help to such good work. There's my daughter, Mrs. Labouchere, had these sort of things out at Malta."

Lady Seaman, who had "scarcely spoken three words to the man" since she

was in the house, was turning on him with a scarcely polite stare, when Mrs. Talbot, his "old friend," interposed.

"How do you mean, Mr. Hardman?" Mrs. Labouchere was watching warily, and was at hand.

"He means the general principle of charity, which nobody can dispute. You remember, papa, the picture you offered to Mrs. Talbot?"

"I mean," said her father, in a loud voice, "that her ladyship might be very glad to have a person like Mrs. Labouchere, who understands these matters, to help her. We could guarantee as handsome a table as could be seen in the place; and, as far as a large subscription goes, a cheque on my bankers——"

"It is very good of Mr. Hardman to offer Mrs. Labouchere's services," said

Mrs. Talbot, with an exquisite expression of malice; "but I fear Lady Seaman seems to have made her arrangements."

"My father mistakes," said Mrs. Labouchere, warmly; "I would not hold a table for anything. Pray understand, it is not I who wish it."

"We are obliged to keep it to our own set," said Lady Seaman, haughtily. "We have had offers of money, and that sort of thing, if we chose to take them; but it could not be done."

"Hardly, I think," said Mrs. Talbot. This was very sweet revenge. Though the great ladies thought a little wistfully of Mr. Hardman's guineas thus lost to them.

"Of course the bazaar is for all-comers, and any one with charitable intentions can walk in, and lay out what they please, and

thus help a most deserving charity. But the organization must be kept to one set."

The almost insolence of this speech, which was spoken to Mrs. Labouchere, whose cheek became pale, Mr. Hardman felt indistinctly. There was something like a hint administered to him. But he went on in his floundering way.

"I am sure, Lady Seaman, I should be delighted to give my mite to such a good institution, as Mrs. Talbot says, and if a cheque on my bankers——"

"Papa!" broke in Mrs. Labouchere, in a deep tone of scorn. "For Heaven's sake do not be offering this assistance where you see it is not desired. Surely, it is said, as plain as words can say it, that your aid is not wanted. Mine need not have been declined, as it was never offered."

"O, I'm sure not," said Lady Seaman. "You would see how difficult it must be. All sorts of people have been asking us, and we are obliged to refuse."

"I repeat, Lady Seaman, you may have refused me, but I never sought the honour of assisting in your bazaar."

"But *I* did," said her father, pompously drawing himself up to resent this repudiation; "for you. I like to see these sort of things supported. And if Lady Seaman had allowed you——"

"This is intolerable," said his daughter, half turning round to leave the room. "Do—do leave the matter as it is."

It was exquisite for the other ladies to see the victim writhing in this fashion on the hook. Mrs. Talbot smiled over at her august acquaintance. She seemed, to herself, to have obtained a handsome

indemnity for all she had suffered at the hands of her enemy. Yet she was only laying up accumulated injuries, for she must surely pay a heavy reckoning. These little vindictive punishments were but shortlived pitiful triumphs. What *they* would be met by, would be far more deadly and lasting. Even as she smiled, came a significant check, for at that moment the Beauty entering, Mrs. Labouchere said suddenly:—

"But here would be a useful friend. Mr. Talbot would go about the rooms bringing recruits, helping the young ladies to sell; or, best of all, he would sing for the charity."

"A charming idea; would you help us, Mr. Talbot? They often get up music at these things."

"Or he might be an auctioneer, and sell

off the articles. Mr. Talbot is such a public man now——"

The Beauty was still in "the sulks," and much aggrieved. He had a little of the French malice about him, and saw very plainly there was an opportunity here for mischief, and with much cordiality said he would be delighted. "When was their bazaar?"

"Next month."

Mrs. Labouchere cried, "O he could manage to go then." They were so sorry they could not offer him a room.

"But that was no matter," he said. "There was Bagshaw close by, who would put him up."

"You see, there is quite a run on you, Mr. Talbot," Mrs. Labouchere went on; "every one wishes to make an engagement with you. By-and-by the demands will

come from London and all parts of the provinces. Ah! in London *you would be appreciated!*"

The Beauty almost blushed. This was all very sweet. "I should like to contribute my humble quota, if it amuses: but whatever honour comes, I owe to you, Mrs. Labouchere."

Again Mrs. Talbot felt that some moves in the little game had gone against her, though it was only a pawn or two. She had not yet put out her strength; though with a sort of nervousness she felt that the time might soon come when she must fight with every weapon. Every hour she was seeing that this woman was not to be despised, and might have a depth of power in reserve, which she dared not think of. This, after all, was but the stinging of the gad-fly, and would be but for a short time,

as Mr. Hardman had announced she was to live for the future in Paris, "and she hated England."

During the rest of their visit the Beauty —still under a sense of wrong—indulged himself in many petty acts of indemnity, all which Mrs. Talbot bore with a smiling calm, as she would the pettishness of a boy. On the night before, he had been out late in the garden, and came in with something like a beginning of a cold, and she said, "You should have taken care, dear, if you *do* mean to sing——"

"Yes, I knew I'd be unfortunate, and have something to interfere. Everything spoiled; and here am I worried and bothered, and we were all going on so nicely——"

"Until I came? But *I* did not give you the cold, did I? I would do some-

thing for it—a mustard plaster, or, your feet in water——"

"Yes, as if I was a child,"—it was wonderful how that little bit of iron had entered into his soul! "to be put to bed with gruel and flannels, and have them all laughing at me."

"Well, you must do one thing or the other, dear. Sing or not sing. Livy and I are dying with curiosity, after the rapturous accounts you wrote us. Though I hear that envious music-master, Jackson, or whatever his name is, is not so cordial in his applause, and says you should get lessons before coming out before the public."

Foolish Mrs. Talbot! again must the chorus of this drama call out. Every one of these little pin thrusts will be registered against you by that childish mind, and

possibly be revenged. He was speechless, and turned away, then went to seek his friend and counsellor.

The night came round, the concert hall was crowded again. The rustics this time had to be "driven," much as his lordship's Irish tenants were, at an election. The old programme was gone through; the sisters warbled and thrilled their "Cam hame wi' the Kye," which they nodded and wagged and spoke, and even danced—everything but sang. The elder had a red plaid scarf, crosswise; the younger a green one, to add to the dramatic effect, and both had one arm a-kimbo, like *real* Scotch lassies, defiant, coquettish, enticing; in fact so carried away by the enthusiasm, that had the Theatre Royal Drury been "convenient" and the manager suggested stepping on those boards for a repetition

of the performance, they would have gone on without hesitation. It must be said this was the performance that most delighted the rustics, who were charmed with its *abandon.* Mr. Jackson, however, wore a smile of good-humoured contempt, as he strummed the few *ex officio* chords, as he called them.

"Hardly singing," he said, later. "That 'Scotch thirds' business was the regular thing for sisters. Papa likes it after dinner. Costa," he added, as if a bosom intimate of that eminent conductor, "would give a hundred pounds to hear that." A donation which might be accepted as a compliment, or the reverse.

They were looking forward with some interest to the re-appearance of the Beauty; for, to say the truth, his Adonis-like air, his sweet and conscious modesty,

which was mere pride, lent a sort of piquancy and amusement. The gentlemen visitors looked at each other with a quiet enjoyment as he passed by in all his *primo tenore* glory. For he had battled with the cold, and was burning, not so much to delight the crowd as to put down those two ladies who were waiting to hear him, and who really seemed to him like enemies, or persons to whom he had a spite. He, most unreasonably, laid to this account a fresh mortification that he had received, namely, an abrupt summons from that new-born eminent connoisseur, Lord Bindley.

"Come, Talbot, I want to hear these two songs of yours together. We can't run any risks, you know. I have my doubts about the new one—at least, Jackson doesn't seem to think it safe."

Thus put on his trial, he had to give them in a rather uncertain and faltering way. Mr. Mendelssohn Jackson did not certainly aid in his department of the venture, —spelling it out with a curious air, as if it were some Japanese system of notation.

"Seems strained and irregular. Ah! we must keep to the A, B, C in these things. You should go to a grinder, and pick up a little harmony. I don't know; we seem getting into the jungle here."

Much alarmed at these forebodings, Lord Bindley said decisively,—

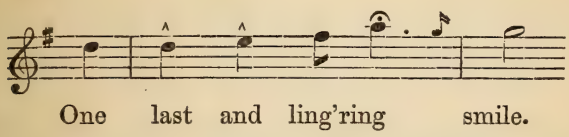
"I beg, Talbot, you will run no risk; and I must request you will sing your first song."

He was out now before the audience. He saw the faces ranged below, and saw his wife's close to him. How he would confound her suspicions and doubts. Yes,

Mrs. Labouchere was right. It was only at home that a man was never appreciated. He had a note in reserve at the end of each verse—a "high A"—which he had kept in ambush, which he would bring out at the close, make the welkin ring—that is, the beams in the ceiling,—and cause them all to look at each other with wonder and amazement. Not even Mendelssohn Jackson knew of it. From that envious practitioner should be wrung unextorted praise. Only to Mrs. Labouchere, just as he went on, had he confided what he had in store. *That* he could not resist. "They will see what is in me!" he said, triumphantly.

He went through his first lines rather doubtfully, for he felt nervous, and, with all his preparation, rather hoarse. But energy and purpose have done greater

wonders. He was warming to the work; he was at the last line; he was entering on the "last and lingering smile." He was lifting himself slowly, gathering himself for the effort—



When, alas! just as with a desperate effort he hoisted himself up on that fatal A, it gave way under him like some frail lath—it snapped; in short, a strange unearthly sound, something "like the crow of a cock," as one of his enemies remarked, filled the hall. Worse still, a sort of titter fluttered over the seats; every one looked at each other and smiled; the gentlemen, standing together, laughed. The Beauty had broken down! How he got through the next verse he knew not. He heard

Mendelssohn Jackson ostentatiously advising him—pointing to the notes with one hand, while he played with the other—"Stick to your text; I'll play it with you." And the "wretch" noisily pounded out the air during the whole of the next verse, looking up in his face, to show that he was guiding and keeping him from going astray. The voice of the Beauty grew fainter and fainter. He would have given the world to have fled away, and hid his head in the earth. At the end Mendelssohn Jackson crashed down some hasty chords and closed the unhappy performance. The Beauty retired hurriedly to scarcely a hand—a good-natured few applauding—Lord Bindley saying, almost angrily, "Really, he ought to have known. Spoiled my whole concert." A coarse, funny man even called out from the back,

"Encore!"—then dipped his head down to escape observation. This produced a laugh: a crowd will laugh at anything.

The jests of the men became unendurable, so coarse and rude. "Gye won't engage you now, when he hears this: give him ever so many lingering smiles, ha! ha!" Another said, "I'd have been content with my crown of laurel; I would, indeed!" While some one said, before Mrs. Talbot, and the circle, "Mrs. Talbot's advice was wise enough, and I would have taken it. I heard her say, that you ought to be content with your glory."

"He will be wiser another time," she said, smiling.

Mrs. Labouchere was at hand; they were just going up to bed. "That would be an unsafe rule," she said. "We never hear of a successful amateur contented

with one performance. No, he tries again. The world would, otherwise, stand still. There would be no success. There is my moral, my advice."

Some of the more sharp-witted had begun to perceive this sort of hostility between the ladies, and were watching with interest. Mrs. Talbot's eyes began to glitter. "Good advice, I fear, is quite thrown away on him."

"Not mine, I know. Mr. Talbot has consulted me so much lately. Now, what I say is—and I am sure I shall be supported—Mr. Talbot has made a great success. He was nervous to-night, and there was a reason for that. You should go on and not be discouraged. Go to London, put yourself under some famous master who will bring out your voice. Go about to parties, and see the world, and

do not be buried in that dismal quarter of the country, where both our houses are. Life is very sweet, and, alas, as short as it is sweet. There is the good woman's charm, and I make him a present of it."

It had effect on the crowd, who went with her, and applauded. The Beauty, more rebellious than ever, vows it to be most sensible; his wife can only act scorn and indifference. She longed for her wretched visit to be at an end, and the more wretched woman to be expatriated to France. Only a few hours more, and she would be away, out of it.

It seemed, certainly, as though she had been worsted in this little series of encounters. She dared not own it to herself; but she had. *The Beauty knew it, too,* as she saw in his malevolent eye; but she said not a word. Alas! as with the in-

genious monkey who goes round in the circus, if the training be suspended but for a day, it is all blank, and has to be recommenced; so she saw that much hard toil was in store for her, and for her alone.

The morning came. The guests gather to see guests go away. The carriage was at the door, and trunks were coming down. Mr. and Mrs. and Miss Talbot were going away.

"So much obliged to you, Talbot," says the host; "mind we see you here again soon."

The ladies were shaking hands, and Mrs. Talbot and her enemy went through the same ceremony. Mr. Hardman stood by. "We shall soon meet again, ma'am. We are neighbours, and as my daughter and Talbot seem such firm allies in the

singing way, I mean to get up a great deal of music——"

A restless trouble and curiosity made her hazard the answer, "O, when she comes back from France?"

"O, we have changed all that," said Mrs. Labouchere, with a smile. "I am going to be filial, *and always to live with my father at the Towers. Bon voyage!*"

CHAPTER IX.

LADY SHIPLEY.

During the absence of Mr. Hardman from the Towers, a new family had arrived in the district. A rather decayed road-side villa had been taken by them, which had been long unlet, and it was presently known that a no less distinguished person than Lady Shipley and her daughter were living there. Lady Shipley was the Dowager Lady Shipley, her daughter was Miss Honoria; to speak the whole truth about them in a single sentence, they were neither more nor less than a pair of marauders, who, like Mr.

Carlyle's parson, had scoured the country seeking for "horse meat and man meat;" in short, had settled down in fat and flourishing districts, which they had pillaged socially far and near, left waste, and then moved on to another. They were genteel, poor, and clever, a combination of attributes which almost amounted to wealth, or, at least, to comfort. Her son, the present Sir Thomas, was married, and not particularly fond of his mother or sister, who had about four hundred a year to live on, eked out by the contributions, *in kind*, of their friends and neighbours. Lady Shipley, it was known, would accept articles of dress and clothing for her Honoria, in a pleasant, sensible way that took the thing quite out of the character of anything eleemosynary.

"Here, Mony," so she called her

daughter, "don't be a fool; you won't get a dress like that to suit you, if you were to go round all the shops." Or:

"My dear Mrs. ——, Mony is very much obliged to you, and has no foolish stuck-up notions about her, I can assure you. She is too well born and well connected to run any chance of being misunderstood, and it will help to keep down her pride a little."

The same lady would invite herself to dinner—to your "little bit of mutton," which was just what she liked, she said, and in this fashion had a most comfortable and enjoyable life. She kept a wary eye out for the sort of persons whom she knew would serve her purpose; and when people were inveighing against rich and vulgar people, her elderly ears quivered like a dog's

when he hears his master approaching.

It was thus when the term of her cheap mansion was expiring that she heard Mr. Hardman described, with his style of manner and of living; and it occurred to her that he was just the sort of person to be near, and to know, *i.e.*, to prey on. "These people, Mony, dear," she said to her daughter, "will be worth a hundred a year to us." She had mapped it all out: a fortnight's visiting every two months, a dinner at least every fortnight, with other perquisites; and a pleasant gentleman giving an agreeable description of the "duke's coachman," and the way that menial was introduced on all occasions, the lady, instead of joining in the laughter, resolved that she should be driven many a time by a person of such august antecedents.

The old villa was procured, "a dead bargain," and some old furniture, which went about with her, was transferred to it.

Mr. Hardman had taken her precisely as she had hoped; had searched his heraldic red and blue books, and had noted with surprise and delight where her exceeding strength lay; was confounded at the noble connections, cousinships, &c., which spread out from her in all directions like the rays of a star-fish. She was exactly what he wished; and he had an instinct that she would graciously lend herself to his humour in a very different fashion from those "stuck-up" Talbots.

The great coach and its still greater coachman had already taken him there, from the windows of which cards had duly

been handed to a mouldy old man-servant, whom Mr. Hardman regarded with exceeding reverence as an aristocratic retainer. The visit had been returned. Lady Shipley had gone in; had sat a long time, and had delighted him by her easy manners, her wish to please, and to be pleased by him. "You have everything charming about you, Mr. Hardman; such taste, such magnificence! I warn you, you will have me coming here very often. It reminds me of The Rams—my cousin Ramsgate's place."

"I know; Lord Ramsgate. Indeed! 'Pon my word! Then, I hope you *will* come very often, Lady Shipley. I hope to see you whenever you find it convenient to yourself."

"And the pictures, and your flowers! I doat on both; I could live and die

among pictures and flowers. Mony, dear, you know that—"

"You like flowers? Here! I say! Send for the gardener, and let him follow us. I have got the finest gardener in the whole shire. Lord Loveland tried to get him from me; but his lordship could not conveniently manage the wages the man asked, and is well worth. Now, Lady Shipley, I request you will point out what you like, and it shall be cut and sent over to you. Fruit—care for fruit, Lady Shipley?"

"Ah! why you know all my tastes! I could live and die in a hothouse, my dear Mr. Hardman."

The marauder, in fact, could live and die anywhere where there were any of the good things of life. She had the odd gift of announcing as her special taste, a liking

for wines, fruits, meats, or everything of the best. Her heavily-built, dowdy person was, indeed, excellent evidence of this fancy. Before she left the garden it was arranged that a great basket, containing flowers and fruits, should be sent over. A dinner, also, had been sketched out. This was not a bad morning's work. But she had not done yet.

"I have heard of Mrs. Labouchere," she said, "and am dying to know her. But you have some one else—a son?"

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Hardman, loftily, as if owning to a luxury which every gentleman ought to possess. "Oh certainly!"

"Oh, where is young Mr. Hardman?" went on Lady Shipley. "I should so like to know him."

Young Mr. Hardman was sent for and produced; and Lady Shipley, after some

expressions of implied gratification at the exhibition of such a treasure, adroitly "shunted" herself on to a siding with Mr. Hardman, leaving the two young carriages coupled behind. The well-trained Honoria lost not a moment, and in a very short time had forced a sort of intimacy, founded on volunteered confidences of her own life, feelings, &c., and of questions as to *his*.

In this artful way there can be established a perfect intimacy and friendship which, though all on one side, seems as good to spectators as any other. The young man, who had reasons for keeping his father in good humour, did his best to make himself agreeable. Then they went away.

His father had been at home some three days, and every morning the son had

intended walking straight into the study, to speak with him on a very important matter. The young man, since his father's return, had been very nervous indeed with the news which he had to break; and after the ladies had gone, seeing that Mr. Hardman was in excellent humour and even spirits, thought it a good opportunity. He knocked at the study door.

"Come in," said his father. "Well! What do you want?"

"Perhaps, sir, you are engaged? If so, I can come another time."

The father looked at him with a dark mistrust.

"This is some damned concealed tailor's bill, sir, or something of the sort. You always come skulking in this way when you have *that* on hand."

"No, no, sir! indeed, nothing of the kind."

Yet it *was* something of the kind, inasmuch as the communication was attended with similar nervousness.

"Then, what is it, sir?"

"What I wished to say, sir, is this: I have always tried to be a good son—at least, to do my best to please you. You, sir, have been a kind father—on the whole—that is, when I deserved it."

"Rubbish, sir! What are you coming to, with all this palaver? You're driving at something disagreeable; and I tell you what, I'll make it disagreeable to you. What is it? Don't waste my time."

Desperate, the young fellow brought it—blurted it—out. His father was not in a rage; but took it quite coolly.

"Well! and what is this to me? Are

you not in a free country? Don't you know I can't force you to do anything? But I can do *this*, my lad—let you be a beggar, which I will, as sure as the stocks rise and fall in the market. Ah! don't talk folly; don't come to me with such trash. Are you a baby or a schoolboy?"

The young man protested, very earnestly, that he was serious. He was pledged—engaged—and must go on. He was bound by honour and duty and affection.

"I won't have it," said Mr. Hardman. "You are a low whining cur. Do you think I made all my money, that bought you that rag of a red coat, and raised you out of the puddle, all for this? I won't have it. I don't choose to have *my* name connected with those infernal, stuck-up, stiff-backed people. Ah! I'll give 'em a

lesson yet, and show them my money is as good as their pride any day. Don't *bother* me, sir," he said, vehemently, "any more! I won't put up with it! I'm ashamed of you, you sneak! with your love and your whine. You raise your family! Raise money is all you'll do, you selfish cur, you!—that won't do a hand's turn to raise me, on whom you fatten. You're no good, and as helpless as any country oaf. Another smart lad, with your advantage and my banker's book at your back, would have pushed forward and made a splendid marriage. Don't talk to me any more about such stuff! I don't see it, and won't see it. There!"

Mrs. Labouchere was to arrive the following morning from town; and the young man—though brother and sister,

they were not too affectionate—thought his best course would be to wait until she came. He had noted that since the marriage she had a sort of influence over her father, the truth being that the mean nature of Mr. Hardman grovelled a little before her in her new position and good connection. She came, and her brother told her all. She started with a scornful and bitter look.

"Yes," he said, hastily; "I knew you did not like them, and was afraid you could not endure them——"

"You quite mistake," she said, coldly. "It is quite a wrong interpretation. I can be just in such an important matter as that. But have you considered what you are about to do? Enter into a family that despise — look down on — you, the manufacturer's son—that have in-

sulted your father, and whose treatment of *me*—but that, of course, I put aside."

"But what *am* I to do? I am pledged to her."

"In that case, you must go on, I suppose. I shall do what you wish to help you. What must it be—speak to him?"

"Oh, if you would!"

"If I do, then, this must be understood—I do no more. I am not called on to favour it in any way. I will not make any approach to them, as it would be hypocritical; and if my manner or ways even hinder it, as I know it will, you must not blame me. But, as far as our father is concerned——"

"It is most kind and generous," said the young man, eagerly; "and I can ask no more."

That night Mrs. Labouchere went to her father's study, and remained there nearly an hour. He received her full of bluster and indignation.

"Such work! That fool's last notion; but I won't have it. He shall marry as I wish, or go and carry his coat through the streets. I shan't have it."

"It is hard," said his daughter; "and certainly, as money seems to be the grand thing now-a-days, he ought to get a good match and raise the family. But these Talbots, father, are they not well connected?"

"A stuck-up, infernal lot; it's just some trick of theirs. But why should *you* mention them? I'm sure they made you swallow dirt enough."

"The greater my magnanimity! But I believe you have got at the secret; it must

be some trick. Like that trap of the picture into which she led you."

Mr. Hardman coloured at this recollection, which was really like some rankling sore.

"They shan't trick me. No; not one of them, if it was to cost me a thousand pound! No; I'll pay 'em for that, yet. Never! I'll bring their noses to the grindstone!"

"Then, if you will let me advise you, father, you will not oppose it."

"Not oppose it! Do you take me for a fool?"

"Not oppose it *now*. It will be done, in spite of you. If I was to manage it, I could find a way of paying off that woman, as you call it, in a more satisfactory way."

"Oh, some scheming. I don't want it. What do you mean?"

"Let the thing go on. The girl's in love with him; they must humour *her*. They are ready to agree. Revenge, and that sort of thing, is low, and not worth the trouble; but you are not bound to be considerate in any way to those who insult us as they have done. The true dignity would be to let the *whole come from them*. You will see how the matter will go on, and you can interfere at any time."

He looked at her steadily.

"I don't understand this finessing. My way has always been straightforward. I don't choose the business, and I won't have it."

"He might do far better. Even that girl that was here to-day—people of wonderful connection, and seeming even far more like *real* ladies. But you, father,

know the world better, and have seen more of it than I have; so I only speak with diffidence."

This bit of deference only made Mr. Hardman more pompous; but it had the effect intended.

"I shall consider all these things, never fear. I don't usually make mistakes. This house and furniture, and the grounds round it, and what I have in the funds and securities, are not mistakes. I can get on very well without advice. There! we may leave the matter so until morning."

But the prospect she had opened would never have occurred to his thick brain; and he did see now that there was a field before him. That slight of the picture returned in so humiliating a fashion, was always before him. Even the man who

had gone off with some of his money long ago had not hurt him so much. The hint he had got he knew how to better in his own clumsy way.

CHAPTER X.

A CLOUD IN THE HORIZON.

MEANWHILE the Beauty and his family were once more at home, the former in very high dudgeon—a sort of settled *sulk*, in which he found great profit. There was a sensible relief for the two ladies to have him at home again, safe and secure, removed to that pleasant retirement out of the dangerous allurements of a disturbing world. He might "vent" himself in any way; he met nothing but indulgence and allowance. He had been recaptured and brought back. On this ground they thought it better to say nothing "till to-

morrow," about the proposal made to his daughter, from which, now, Mrs. Talbot began to shrink as from a degradation; yet she was generous and unselfish enough to think only of her daughter, who must not suffer, and whose affections she saw were seriously engaged. That was the most unselfish sacrifice she had ever made in her long career.

For a species of sword of Damocles had been hanging over her head ever since she returned; and the news she had heard, as she left Lord Bindley's, that the unscrupulous woman was to be near her—for what end she could well guess—had seemed some terrible blow. As yet she believed that she had not returned home.

About evening young Hardman himself came riding up, and hurried in.

"I have told my father," he said, in a rather agitated way; "and he was very angry at first, principally, I believe, because I had not consulted him. But now he is much more moderate, and says I must not be in a hurry in these matters, and must consult his convenience." And then he added—"But you know what my poor father would say, as to great people condescending to *him*, which of course is all imagination. Of course we never anticipated it would run smooth; but Livy will not visit it on me?"

Livy's eyes visited on him the most boundless sympathy and affection instead.

Mrs. Talbot saw this, and sighed.

"You have told Mr. Talbot this plan? I did not the other day. I merely hinted—"

"No."

"Shall he be told now? There he is."

Mrs. Talbot thought it would be better to delay this communication till they were alone.

The Beauty entered, dull and aggrieved; but his face cleared and brightened when he saw the young man.

"How are you, Hardman? How are they at The Towers? *All home again?*"

"Thank you," said the young man, "quite well. My sister came back only last night. By the way, here is a note I was to give you."

He took it out and put it into the Beauty's hand, who withdrew into the next room to read it. Mrs. Talbot almost writhed.

"A note from my sister," the youth said, in explanation.

The Beauty went out, and after about ten minutes the bells of Livy's ponies

were heard. He came in dressed—a fresh flower in his button-hole, a grey "gossamer" over his well-made coat.

"I am going to drive over your way, Hardman," he said; "and could drop you. No? All right, then; I can go by myself."

Again there was something of monkeyish malice in the look he gave her. Then he rattled away brilliantly on his course.

Young Hardman was at last gone, but the Beauty did not return for two or three hours. He arrived in a sort of complacent excitement, the symptoms of which his wife knew at once. As soon as he was in the drawing-room, he began—

"So it seems there is a marriage being arranged here, which it was not worth while communicating to me?"

"We had a reason for not telling you, Beauty dear."

"It sounds very respectable though for me to be told of such a thing outside. It is enough to make every one think I am a mere child and cipher in this house. Yes, a mere cipher and child! Who can respect me, if my own family show they do not?"

Mrs. Talbot listened with wonder to this new language, which she knew was not his own.

"There was nothing to tell you," she said. "It was only last night that he told his father."

"If I am to have any voice in the matter, I do not approve of it. There will be always a sense of patronage on one side, and an uneasy feeling of inferiority on the other."

Again these were new words for the Beauty—lent to him, as it were.

"Go away, dearest Livy. I want to talk to your father about this."

"Oh, nonsense. Why shouldn't she stay. We are not going to talk treason here; and if we are, she would not betray us. I don't like these private interviews."

"Go away, dear."

And Livy left the room. The Beauty did not relish these secret hearings. When they were alone his wife began, calmly—

"You must admit that our child has been the sweetest, most amiable, and devoted daughter that could be conceived. She has had rather a severe apprenticeship."

"Oh, yes; I am not saying anything against her."

"We must not be too selfish. She has

set her heart, her affections on this. That means, with one of her disposition—her all. You must see this?"

"Well, but I think it is not suitable for her. There will be that sense of inferiority——"

"Oh, I know—on one side. I would rather hear your own views and not Mrs. Labouchere's. You have them off by heart. Speak your own opinions, and I will pay them all respect."

The Beauty coloured, and grew confused.

She went on—

"You know how that woman treated me, how she dislikes me, how I despise her. Now I think, even for one's self-respect, it is scarcely decent of you to become her partisan, or to be affecting to be so intimate with her. It is not com-

plimentary to me; and I think it shows a little bad taste in you."

"Oh yes; but I have been treated too much as a child all along, and a cipher in the house; and I don't like it. If you knew what things are said——"

"By her?"

"By every one. It is perfect nonsense, and it can't go on. Why shouldn't I go and see her? Her kindness to me during all that time I shall never forget; and her sympathy and good-nature, too. Ah, *she* understands me. I am sure it is not unreasonable that a father should have a voice in the matter. I don't want to interfere with Livy and her happiness. He is a very good fellow, and all that; but I should have been told of it, consulted, and all that. It's only the proper thing, you see."

CHAPTER XI.

MR. HARDMAN PAYS A VISIT.

THE next day he went about dissatisfied, scarcely touching his piano. At dinner his wife said—

"Why don't you go out, dear, and take a good walk with Livy? You will get ill."

"O, I can't be always walking. Really, I'm not a school-boy quite—to be sent out to take an airing. If I had a horse, then I could ride—as every other man in a place like this has; but I can have nothing like any one else."

"But why not get a horse, dearest?

We should both be so glad to see you riding about."

"O, the expense! and you wouldn't like it. It wouldn't suit the petticoat government under which I live. O, no."

These, again, were words foreign to him; still they pointed merely at a little domestic grievance, not at the one which they so dreaded. It was a relief. Before the day was over, it had been all planned, and Mrs. Talbot came to him with a scheme.

"It is quite reasonable," she said; "and, indeed, I think you ought to have your horse. Livy and I make you a little present—this five-and-twenty pounds out of our bank; and you can make up the rest yourself."

The Beauty was greatly pleased, but

he was a gentleman, after all, and would not take their money.

"I am not so dependent as that," he said; "but I know where I can get a capital horse for forty pounds, and get time to pay for him, without taking your little money. No, no."

He was very proud of himself for this. Perhaps, too, he wished not to lay himself under any obligation which might hamper his future movements; perhaps he felt a twinge of conscience. No matter, the horse came home that very evening; and the Beauty took to making long rides.

Next day drove up the Hardman carriage, its owner seated back in it, with quite a sheriff-like air. He got out in a slow, solemn way; stood on the steps a few moments, giving orders to his ser-

vants while the door was kept open; then entered slowly.

"Tell Mrs. Talbot, please, that I would be obliged to her to let me speak to her privately. Privately!—you understand?"

It was wonderful the change in Mr. Hardman as he appeared to Mrs. Talbot when he entered. She understood it all, and it was a deep humiliation. There was a puffed importance, half medical, half official; and his chin was elevated some more degrees.

"I have come," he said, "to speak about this matter, which concerns us both so immediately."

"O, about the proposal your son made my daughter. It was so unexpected—such a surprise—that I thought it better not even to mention it when you were at Bindley."

She could not resist taking this tone, and it gave her her old superiority.

"Of course—of course," he said; "quite right. You see though, Mrs. Talbot, I have been turning the matter over a great deal; and, of course, it comes to this; I must look at it as a pure matter of business."

"A pure matter of business!" she repeated. "O, you are joking, surely?"

"Not all, ma'am. Love, and all that, is very well; but I, as a man of sense, must consider it in other ways. Now, I know you are people of good family and connections, and all that, and very suitable; but, then, our side has it corresponding advantages, too. My son will come into a very large income; I may naturally look for a very high and advantageous connection for him—very high,

ma'am, as things go now! Plenty of girls in the market—ay, and that I know of; people of rank, and all that."

"Then we have no wish to interfere with your *market*, Mr. Hardman; not for a moment."

"Now," went on Mr. Hardman, "I do not know what sort of fortune Miss Talbot will bring with her; but I may assume it will be a very moderate one. I am not saying there is any discredit in that—far from it; but——"

"Now once for all," said Mrs. Talbot, with a calm contempt, under which he became restless, "let us put this on its proper footing. This all should come last, instead of first. You seem to me to begin in the Turkish fashion; and I must tell you simply, Mr. Hardman, that *we* cannot treat, as you would call it, in this *rather*

business-like way. We must pay some little homage to the conventional usages, after such things are arranged; to a little regard and affection in the matter—the only things that would tempt us at all, or certainly my daughter, into the business. Let us speak frankly on the matter, Mr. Hardman. There are many reasons which should make this alliance unsuitable to both families; but the only one which makes us favour it, is that our children have set their hearts on it."

Very red and puffed, Mr. Hardman replies—

"Oh, I don't follow that at all, ma'am. With my fortune and my house, and the tone of the day, ma'am, I hold myself as a good connection for any lord's family in the kingdom; and as for my son's fancy, I don't value it *that*—not *that*, ma'am,

unless it should fall in with my plans."

Mrs. Talbot could have come forth with a contemptuous reply, that would have crushed him—taking him at his word, and leaving him there for ever. But the image of her child came back on her, worldly woman as she was.

"Napoleon said we were a nation of shopkeepers," she answered, with a smile; "and if he heard your views, Mr. Hardman, he might think himself right. But I may surely speak with the same frankness? Now this arrangement does fall in with *our*—with my plans—for we do value our daughter's fancy a great deal. You see that is quite an opposite view. However, there need be no hurry, surely, with such views on both sides? We may wait, I suppose, a little, while these young people

learn to test their affection? This was what I had to go through myself. Let us say four or five months; not a very long probation."

At this idea of confidential arrangement, the vulgarity of the man, swelling and swelling, frog-like, had like to fairly burst him.

"I see," he said; "well, we can wait, ma'am. You and I understand each other. All right!"

Vulgarity is, of course, used here after Sir Walter's definition or explanation of the word. His heart warmed at her tenacity of purpose.

"Hope to see you very often at the Towers, and that we shall see each other reciprocally. You mustn't mind," he added, loftily, "my daughter, Mrs. Labouchere. She has a putting-down way

with her; and at Bindley I know she was a little annoying. I told her so."

Mrs. Talbot writhed under this familiarity, more than she had ever done before. He went on—

"We like your husband very much; he is so pleasant and agreeable, and Mrs. Labouchere makes quite a pet of him. His voice is really getting very fine; and when he was lunching with us yesterday I thought that he sang better than I ever heard him."

The well trained lady showed no surprise. Mr. Talbot had not mentioned this visit. It flashed on her also—*this was the purpose for which the horse had been purchased.* It was growing serious indeed. There was something here like planning, and revolt.

It was a relief when Mr. Hardman went

away, going to call on Lady Shipley, and engage her for a dinner or lunch. Long after, Mrs. Talbot remained in a pensive, thoughtful attitude, lines growing in her forehead, searching out some plan. By dinner the Beauty was at home, in great spirits. He had enjoyed his ride thoroughly. He spoke of the visit of that morning.

"Mr. Hardman was here, was he not?" he said, with new respect, that was quite evident to all. "A real, intelligent, long-headed man. I can see he wishes to be friendly with us, and meet us more than half way; and it is really foolish to stand off now that he is to be connected with us. We have quite misjudged him all along; and I think his views on this matter do him great honour. These self-made men, you know, have a sensitiveness that seems to us pride."

These were wonderful distinctions for a man like the Beauty; but they were clearly not his own.

"He is very willing and very good-natured," went on the Beauty, warming. "He has asked me to dine to-morrow, in a friendly and family way. You know, as we are to be connected, it is absurd standing on ceremony."

"That is just the reason I would stand on ceremony with a person of his class. But you forget we have asked the parson and his family."

"Parson—nonsense!" the Beauty said pettishly. "So vexatious! Then you must put him off; I can't have my little amusements, without being interfered with in this way. Why can't I be like other men, who are consulted in these matters, before making my household

arrangements? I can't be here—indeed, I cannot. I don't want to be a child—a cipher—in my own house."

"He is a clergyman, and we must pay him respect. It can't be thought of. You must write and say you did not know of our invitation."

"Then I can't do anything of the kind. You must only entertain him yourself."

"No, no; you must not give way to such folly as that! You are not going to be *ungentlemanly*, I suppose?"

"Oh, that's a very smart way to put it! I am as gentlemanly as any other. But that's neither here nor there; and, I don't mean to be made a cipher of in my own house, and be laughed at. I can't do it, really."

"We shall see, dear," said Mrs. Talbot,

unhappily for her, beginning to lose her temper.

"Very well; we *shall* see," the Beauty answered, turning red. "This has gone on too long—much too long. I don't mean to make enemies, and lose my dinner party; and, if you were sensible, you would put no obstacle in the way, and fall in with my wishes."

These again were not his own words.

On this day the cheery figure of Mr. Lumley was seen stamping along up to the door, where he had not arrived for some time; he had had a bad fit of bronchitis, which he had fought off in his usual Widderington style—very much, as it was certain he would cross swords with the enemy he so dreaded. Here he was, "pulled down" a good deal, but cheery, as ever: in crimson tie, and pale trousers.

"Just come down to hear all the news," he said. "Been ill, you know, in my chambers; and have been cut off from that sort of nourishment—quite hungry and thirsty for it now."

So he was, for the world had behaved is its usual fashion to its dear worldlings when they are ill, or past work. And all his dear friends, when they heard that "old Dick was ill," assumed he was as good, or as bad, as dead. This was rather a shock to him; and it was natural he should first turn to the house where he had always received a friendly welcome, and where nothing had been expected in return. He must stay and spend the night, and he was delighted to do so.

His quick eye, in a few hours, saw how matters stood. With his old probe—a little bent and rusty now—he got to the

bottom of the Beauty's new weakness; and his sense was sufficiently alive to see how Mrs. Talbot was affected. Walking briskly round the garden, to get an appetite for breakfast, he met Livy, fresh and blooming as a rose, devouring, when she thought no one saw her, one of the welcome notes on blue paper, which came to her every morning from the Towers. Her story he soon learned; his pleasant "Robin-redbreast manner," as one of his friends called it, invited confidence, though it did not hold out sympathy; and he was amused to see the faint crack, "the little rift," which might make the music mute which Mr. and Mrs. Talbot played together so harmoniously. He began, almost at breakfast, with a comic story of a certain Bob Lindsay—one of the best things—married to one of the Fermors—

who got fifteen thousand, "which stopped some leaks in the ship."

"A shallow-pated fellow. The girl threw herself away; and the best was, I told her so, plainly."

The Beauty knows him, too, and says, contemptuously, "he had nothing in him."

Old Dick Lumley was now getting into one of his stories.

"Well, off they started; and who should they fall in with but that go-a-head Mrs. Allington, *née* Kitty Crowder, now separated from her husband, and with nothing to do. Well, no game would suit her but to worry a new married pair; and she did it. That wretched, empty-pated Bob Lindsay—you could not conceive the donkey she turned him into: making him fetch and carry; lend her money; pay her debts; in fact, do all those things we

might expect from Kitty. We, his friends, were sore to see him making such a goose of himself. I declare I was ashamed, and went and spoke to him; but was received as might be expected. All the time the woman was playing him off against a captain; and, when the opportunity came, he was left there, making a very pitiable show indeed. We had a good laugh at it, at I don't know how many dinner-parties."

The Beauty listened with a very put-out air, and moved restlessly on his chair.

"Oh, but he was always a fool. Nothing in him. That makes all the difference."

"Makes the difference from what?" said Old Dick, with a comic twinkle. "My dear fellow, *you* don't mean to justify married men going on in that style?"

"I didn't say so. Of course not. But

I mean a man isn't to be tied to apron-strings all his life. It makes him and his wife ridiculous."

"Not so ridiculous though," says Mrs. Talbot, "as that foolish philandering, as it is called—always childish in even young men, but, in men with a family, quite laughable."

The Beauty turned red and hot.

"Some one said, the other day, that those who were fondest of holding up everything as laughable were themselves the most laughable."

"A woman's speech, I'm sure, and a clever woman's!" said Mr. Lumley.

"Exactly," said the Beauty, eagerly; "a most clever woman, with quite a turn for epigram. Touches off everything like that."

"You are speaking of Mrs. Labouchere,

I suppose," said his wife, with a smile of contempt. "Your standard of epigram cannot be very high."

"Oh! what, the woman that married poor Labouchere, the tinplate or machinery man's daughter? Oh, I believe there were some nice doings out at Malta, or Gibraltar, or wherever they were. She was a sort of professional flirt. What *was* the story about some young fellow? Poor Lab had enough of his bargain, I believe."

Old Dick Lumley, it is to be feared, had neither chapter nor verse for these scraps of scandal; but his was not as other men's scandal. He imagined that, under certain conditions, there were things that *must* happen, or else the world would be turned upside down; and that a woman—of the sort he had settled Mrs.

Labouchere to be — must behave in a corresponding way. He had no scruple, therefore, in saying a thing of this sort.

Mrs. Talbot tossed her head calmly. "Only what we might expect."

"I am sure it is not what we might expect. She is a true, clever woman, full of taste and accomplishments——"

"What, because she gets you to sing, dear, all because she thinks I don't like your exhibiting yourself?"

"Why, Talbot, you're not her champion, are you? For shame, sir. You shock my morals. Depend upon it, the woman wants to get something out of you."

Miss Livy, it may be said, was not present.

"Oh, yes!" said the Beauty, trying to

sneer, "that is all very well! I assure you, there are some really good-natured and kind people in the world. As for these stories, I simply say, I don't believe a word of them. She is above that sort of thing. And I think it is a shame to have such tales circulated about people."

"Oh, my dear friend, you are not turning philosopher on us? There is chapter and verse to be had for all these sort of things; and if you take a man of the world's advice, you'd give her a wide berth. That's all I have to say about it. As for stories; why, you remember what I told you the last time I was here?"

The Beauty was quick enough to see an advantage here.

"If it was as true as *that* story, why, it was *your*" (to Mrs. Talbot) "spreading

that calumny that made Colonel Labouchere marry her. *I* heard what he said——"

"My spreading a calumny! You cannot know what you are talking about. You should not make such speeches, even before a friend like Mr. Lumley."

"Then ladies' characters should not be taken away before him either."

"Come, now," says Old Dick, "don't let us be magnifying things more than we need. What have we to do with this woman at all? Let her be. Let her be, and go on with her pranks. What do we care?"

"She is to be connected with my family," says the Beauty, "to be Livy's sister-in-law; so I think we owe something to our own respect."

Mr. Lumley was amazed and even

silenced. It was wonderful how the Beauty had picked up all these topics from a certain quarter, and put them by for use. He saw, too, that he had the best of it, and quitted the room with a foolish pride and heat. He got out his horse. Mrs. Talbot fretted, beside herself with forebodings, and mad with herself for having lost the old buckler of patience and indifference which she had so long carried, now despised herself for her want of restraint, and for having given this weak soul such an advantage. The sound of the horse riding away almost struck a chill; and, though she saw from the window that he took another road, she knew he was artful enough to take a round, and then go in the direction of The Towers.

Old Dick Lumley, with his spectacles

on—never troublesome in a house—was left in the drawing-room, reading the *Court Journal.*

"What is over our friend?" he said, as she entered. "Foolish fellow! But let me give you a bit of advice, my dear—and I heard old Lady Mantower give it again to her daughter—laugh at everything of the kind: show that you don't care that for it. He'll soon tire of it. Talbot is a little youngish still, though he has a grown-up daughter—who, however, looks about six years younger than her mamma," added Old Dick, mending an awkward inference.

She was not thinking of such things.

"Oh, *he* is nothing! But she is a dangerous, *wicked* woman. What did you hear about her? Tell me—do."

"Oh, come," says Dick, taking off his

spectacles, "you nearly got me into a scrape before. Now, do take care about these things; it is very incautious, and with a low creature of that sort. Oh, I can't give chapter and verse for all the scraps I hear at this dinner and that, no more than I can for all the scraps I eat."

"But you said you could give chapter and verse. Do tell me; and you'll ever oblige me."

"Oh, my dear woman, nonsense; I really can't. And now, I must speak to you about all this. You are making mountains of mice, and will give yourself a great deal of annoyance, yet, depend upon it; take an old friend's word for it. Let our Beauty sing his little song, and pay his little visits to this Labouchere, and get what amusement he can out of it.

She, or he, will soon tire of it. She'll find it troublesome the first, and perhaps snub him. And then, you see, there's this marriage coming on, the connection between the families; one must keep up a decency. No, no; take my advice and leave it alone. At dinner, you'll see how I'll laugh him out of it."

This was sound advice from a man who knew a good deal. It had been well for that lady had she followed it, for she would have been spared many troubles. During the day the veteran and Livy went out for a short walk, when he enforced the same doctrine. "We must keep our mamma a little in hand, or she will be worried more than you could possibly dream of. She must not be too sensitive about these things. We all know papa, a good and capital fellow in his way; but

a very young and good-looking papa, and rather inclined to be led by the last person met—you understand."

"Oh, Mr. Lumley!" said Livy, opening her heart. "This is what I am thinking of, and it gives me such a deal of anxiety, I hardly know what to do."

"She must just show that she is utterly indifferent to his little amusements. Why shouldn't she? There's no harm in him. And I think I know that lady a little, who is to be your sister-in-law, and I can tell you she is a person not to fall out with. She has all the sensitiveness of inferior caste, feeling herself at the mercy of one in the position of your mother. It is like a rankling sore. Take my advice, and leave her alone."

CHAPTER XII.

FACE TO FACE.

The old *gandin* was fond of Livy in his own way, and but for the horror he had of the arch enemy, and of all its associations, ceremonies, &c., which made him turn his back on the idea of "a will," he might have put her down for a little legacy. She came in very grave from that walk. Old Dick had had a little quiet nap of a quarter of an hour, with his handkerchief over his head, and was reading his *Court Journal* comfortably in the library, by himself, when he heard the sound of wheels crunching the gravel of the place. It was

the great Hardman *Berline*, ploughing its way up to the door. Mr. Lumley peered round the edge of the curtain to see who it was, and, seeing but indistinctly, wondered who the showy dressed lady was who got out. He wondered still more when the servant came and told him that Mrs. Labouchere wished to see him. Why she wished to see him, at once flashed upon "Old Dick," and he employed the minute's interval in marshalling his thoughts.

The lady swept in haughtily. Mr. Lumley bustled about, as obsequious as any young cavalier.

"Bless me!" he said, "some time since we last met, Mrs. Labouchere. I am not a man for compliments, or I would——"

"Nor do I care for them," she said, impatiently. "I have not come to this house

to receive them; that you may be certain of."

"To be sure!" said he, a little put out. "Did I understand, though, you wished to see me? Mrs. Talbot, I am sure——"

"She is coming—ah, here she is."

And Mrs. Talbot entered, with a nervous flush on her cheeks; but with her lips compressed, as if ready to go through anything.

"Now," said the visitor, in an icy measured tone. "I have come to pay this visit because I wished to see Mrs. Talbot and Mr. Lumley both together. I am so glad to have found you."

"This seems a sort of mystery. Pray explain, as quickly as you can."

"I have been informed that it was stated in this house, that certain stories could be told of my behaviour abroad, during the

life-time of my husband. I may as well mention that this escaped by a sort of accident from Mr. Talbot. It was Mr. Lumley who said he could bring forward some racy anecdotes of this sort. Mrs. Talbot seemed to say they would be of such a character as she could expect. Now, I ask Mr. Lumley distinctly, what are these slanders?"

Mute astonishment was in the faces of both; dismay in that of Mr. Lumley. He almost trembled.

"O! my dear lady!" he gasped. "Surely you don't attach importance to any idle——"

"What are these slanders—these stories. Do you know of any time or place?"

"Oh, really, if one were to remember all the gossip—"

"Do you venture to say there is any?

I, that was known in the place for my devotion to my husband—for my almost recluse sort of life! Do you dare, Mr. Lumley, to say so; or do you shrink from substantiating your words?"

"My dear Mrs. Labouchere, I neither substantiate, nor shrink from them: simply, because, there is nothing in the matter. You know, I hear—going about in my little way—such a quantity of stories, odds and ends, and all that, that one confuses names sometimes."

"Then you heard nothing of me—yes or no: recollect this is a question of calumny, not of accuracy?"

"Well—er—*no*, Mrs. Labouchere. I am sure I confounded one name with another."

"Are you certain—yes or no again?"

"Well, yes."

"There! I thought so. Then I simply say the whole is false—a fabrication. For shame! you should be more careful. An old man like you! Are you satisfied, Mrs. Talbot?"

"Am I satisfied?"

"You are doubtful? What, after Mr. Lumley withdrawing his statement? I suppose you do not doubt his words. I should not take this trouble, only that I am obliged to do it, from what happened before. You recollect?"

Mrs. Talbot, every time that she met this lady, was more and more conscious of a weakness in her presence—that she was in presence of a mistress. Her little sparkling waters of readiness seemed to her all dried up. She felt she could not answer, except with rudeness.

"I do not think of the matter one way

or the other. It is new, certainly, that we should be brought to account for what is said at our private breakfast table."

"You must make your husband accountable for that, not me."

"Ah, poor Talbot! make him accountable, poor boy, for a few light words. My dear Mrs. Labouchere, you won't take an action against us, or put me in the stocks for my little anecdotes?"

"You call them anecdotes; I call them——"

"Exaggeration? well. But, my dear madam, you must consider this; everybody of note must be talked about, and have things said about them. It's a sort of compliment. No lady in society minds it. It shows she's of importance. Come, don't be too hard on me."

She gave this "poor old creature,"

who was glancing nervously at her, a look of contempt, then turned to Mrs. Talbot.

"We shall say no more about it. Is Olivia, so I must call her, as she is to be my future sister-in-law, at home? I should like to see her."

"She has gone out."

"I am so sorry. Everything seems to combine to make our families intimate. Your daughter marries my brother. I discover Mr. Talbot's musical gifts, and he comes over to get lessons. Almost the first day of our acquaintance, my father brings you the present of a picture."

"Which I refused," adds Mrs. Talbot, quickly.

"Which you refused, and mortified him. In spite of that, we are all being drawn closer together. I, myself, shall not be here very long; the country makes me

dismal, and I sigh for the rarefied social air of London."

After this, she rose to go, Mrs. Talbot, still under the spell, and not able to make any battle. She felt herself overpowered. Old Dick, going out with extra gallantry to see the lady to the carriage, no hat on his head. Then Mrs. Talbot stood up hastily, with a wild and fierce look.

"I cannot endure this longer—coming into my own room to insult me! I could kill her!"

Soon after, the Beauty came riding home in great spirits. He did not reckon on what was in store for him. Mr. Lumley was the first to enlighten him, who fell on him with an old man's bitterness.

"I say, my friend, are you losing your wits? That was a very shabby trick of

yours; and, really, we'll have to talk before you, as cautiously as before the servants, if you go on this way. My dear, good Beauty, what was over you, that you should go and tell what we were talking of here, your wife and I?"

The Beauty coloured deeply.

"I don't know what you mean."

"Oh, but you do. She was here in her coach, and there was the devil to pay, and all that. Really you don't know what has happened. You know, if we lose confidence among gentlemen, why we may as well give up."

"And she came here and told you? What a thing!"

"Rather, what a thing of you, to denounce your own wife and your guest. I declare it looks like madness."

"I never did it. She got it out of me.

She said she was sure that you and Mrs. Talbot were cutting her up; and then I was so astonished——"

"What, now tell of *her!* Here Mrs. Talbot! Here is the informer."

She looked at him with a contempt which he shrank from.

"I do not believe it still," she said. "Can it be possible you should have done this? I prefer to think it an invention."

"Oh, it's not fair, all this; both of you setting on me. I tell you she is very clever and puts things together; and I know——"

"I wish to hear no more of it. We must be only more careful in future. There is dinner."

"I believe," said Old Dick Lumley to her, privately, "it is as he says. That

Labouchere enticed it all out of him. Don't let us bother him any more about it. Never fear, though," added Old Dick, looking as spiteful as a demon; "*I'll pay her!*" And when he was going to his own room he repeated the promise, with an addition,—"*By* ——, *I'll pay her!*"

This incident, however, was very disastrous for the Beauty, who felt he had committed a most compromising blunder, and placed himself at the mercy of the family. Mr. Lumley, introducing some of his good things, would say,—

"Now I must make it as a request, Talbot, that you will not repeat this to the parties concerned; it would bring about serious mischief."

On which Mrs. Talbot would add,—

"I prefer to lose the story altogether.

I have no wish to be drawn into the matter, and have them invading our house to call me to account."

"But, in this matter of to-day, what amuses me is to see the unkind return you met with—the betrayer betrayed in his turn. There is no faith in these matters. It is always the way. Certainly a most mortifying return for volunteering a communication. But, my dear fellow, whatever you do, let me off in future—or, at least, tell me, and I'll keep a regular padlock on my jaws in your presence."

The Beauty was much mortified by this lecture. He felt himself in the power of these two people, and knew his own weakness. Yet the iron, shaped like a pin, had entered into his soul; and he longed to revenge himself.

Old Dick Lumley, as he took his candle that night, talked with the hostess in a comfortable, self-satisfied way.

"You have done him a world of good. You see, I have met such a deal of character, I know exactly what suits each. A stiff, tight hand is the only thing with our poor fellow—just a little severity. You see how I brought him up. Oh, it has done him a world of good."

Mrs. Talbot thought so too; and when they were alone, and the Beauty was looking moodily into the fire, said, firmly,—

"What made you do that to-day? Are you taking leave of your senses, or of the common notions of a gentleman?"

He did not answer.

"Such a disgraceful, disreputable business—like what a child in a nursery would

do. You must really reform all these boyish ways. It is not respectful to me, and you only expose yourself to such mortification as you received to-day. If you do not choose to keep up my respect, I shall not take any trouble about yours. I don't choose to hear your second-hand opinions, and you need not bring any more of them here. A pretty brains-carrier you have chosen!"

The Beauty lifted his face, flushed with anger.

"Ah, you are afraid of her! No wonder. She lectured you well to-day. Came off to attack you in your own den! Oh, yes! You'll not find she'll be put down in that way. As she says, she is going to be Olivia's sister-in-law, and the families to be connected; and yet we try and shut our eyes, and affect to despise her. She

says it's very poor pride, and that if we had real sense we would make as much of their family as possible; and that people will only laugh at the contradiction. Oh, yes!"—the only sort of sneer the Beauty could manage—"And, I tell you, I shouldn't be surprised, if she yet *forced you* to receive her with the greatest cordiality."

Mrs. Talbot listened with wonder and even terror. There was truth in this.

"O! We shall see that! Let her try it. Let you both try it."

The foolish husband smiled with delight. He had touched her.

"Oh, I think it only sensible; when I go so far as to connect myself with a family who may not be in our station, I would make the best of it; and, I tell you, *I* mean to be on as friendly terms

as possible with them. You can do as you please, of course."

"It matters very little what you do," said the hurt Mrs. Talbot, forgetting all her old tactics, her labour of years, in a moment. "Mrs. Labouchere is not a person that I should enter into any contest of the kind with; and as for you, you are not very dangerous. What would you be without me, I should like to know? Who would care anything what you say or do—you poor, foolish creature! What would you be thought of at all, but for me? It is like your foolish ingratitude to forget all that you owe to me, who got you the very place that helps to buy you ivory brushes, and pomatums, and scents. Who is it that prevents you being considered a mere cipher among men, and keeps you from being laughed at? Oh, it

is time to speak plainly, and let you know all this."

"It's all untrue, and you shouldn't speak to me in that way. Yes; if you knew what is said, and how they laugh at me for allowing it. Oh, yes! I've kind friends, who tell me for my good; and I'm really obliged to them, who have my interest at heart, too. Yes, that's exactly what I hear. They do laugh at me, because I seem to be worried and ordered about; so it comes very badly from *you.* But it musn't go on; and you'll see it won't."

Mrs. Talbot's heart struck her as she heard these words, and her lips trembled, as she could only murmur,—

"What do you mean? You are talking folly."

That night she almost execrated the

foolish advice of Old Dick Lumley; for the Beauty, with all his folly, had gained a substantial victory.

END OF VOL. II.

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BEAUTY TALBOT.

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

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BEAUTY TALBOT.

CHAPTER I.

OUT OF BOUNDS.

Next morning the Beauty went as usual to work at the office where he was engaged, and Mr. Lumley went in with him, for some shopping. Mrs. Talbot stood out on the steps to see them off. She had seen her mistake, and had this morning put on many extra charms, and much sweetness. But there was a manner about the Beauty, a spiteful air of self-satisfaction and triumph, which really struck a chill to her heart; for he had used weapons not his own, and she saw

that he knew he had used them with success. This gave her a terrible presentiment for the future. But now, on this morning, she was all smiles and spirits, seeing the two gentlemen off in her little carriage, that was to take them to the railway. Just as they were driving away, a groom drove up with a letter for Mr. Talbot, which he took a look at with a peculiar smile, and saying it was "all right," drove off. She knew well whose that groom was, and was disturbed at the foolish look of pleasure on her husband's face. When alone with her daughter, the latter remarked the worn look of anxiety that came upon her, and putting her arm about her, tried hard, by embraces and caresses, to soothe her. The mother said:—

"Oh, I feel there is trouble coming,

dearest. Something that will make the rest of my life miserable, after you have left me."

"But how, dearest? Poor Beauty——"

"That woman—this is her excitement, her amusement. She thinks she has a more powerful mind than mine: she has, certainly, one more unscrupulous. She will stick at nothing, as they say——"

"But, dearest, why not approach her, meet her a quarter of the way, at least; make a friend of her?"

"Never, never. Let me die before I come to *that* humiliation. You cannot know what my life has been—one of victory and triumph. I am not going to bend to a person of her stamp. If I lose everything, I will not do it. And yet, what must I do? She has this fatal hold on us—what she has taught *him*, your

father, to say, that the families are to be connected, and that we are bound to them. Ah! that cannot be helped now."

Livy looked at her with a strange wonder, as if some new light had come upon her, then hung her head and remained silent. The day passed over in their usual occupation; evening drew on, and the hour of the train which was to bring back both gentlemen. Mrs. Talbot, in her own room, had thought over the mistake she had committed, and determined to atone for it by quite a new line of conduct. She had determined on a fresh programme, soothing and gentler, with due humouring. Some strange, unbending, stiff-necked spirit within was urging her not to yield "to that woman." Here were the bells of Livy's ponies, here were the two ladies out

on the steps, and here was only Old Dick Lumley returned by himself. They turned pale. No accident? Old Dick was a little nervous.

"Well, he *would* stay, hang him. I did my best, I assure you. He is at Starridge's Hotel for to-night. But here is his letter. Some ball he is mad to go to."

"A ball!" repeated Mrs. Talbot. The Beauty's letter ran as follows:—

"I have been begged to stay for a party to-night in Great Cumberland Street. I will be down in the morning. Please send my clothes back by the next train, and I will have some one to meet them in town."

This was the whole scrap.

"It is very absurd," said Mr. Lumley;

"as I told him, he ought to be done with balls by this time. But she asked for the invitation for him, and offered to take him in their carriage."

"She! Oh, that Mrs. Labouchere."

Mr. Lumley gave her a curious look. "He seems determined to set out on a new life. I date it from that unlucky 'Last and Lingering Smile,' which we made him sing, and sing too much of. Now to go to my room, and when I've had my little nap, I'll come in and tell you all my adventures."

But a very weary and *distrait* evening followed. The old gentleman, with the best will in the world, felt that too much was cast upon him; he was too selfish to enjoy so much hodman's labour, which was not at all encouraged with the applause it deserved. And he went to bed rather

early, and grumbling at those two homely women who had not much tact between them. This sort of *scholastic* life would not do, and, in fact, injured his health. So he would get a letter next day or so, obliging him to leave. How could he waste time keeping these two foolish people together, who hadn't the tact to disguise their "bothering" troubles. In truth, his sympathies were with that clever woman, Mrs. Labouchere, who seemed to hold a little of the precious *elixir vitæ* in her, and which he could by mere contact inhale. Sprightly, dashing people, full of spirits, seemed to furnish his frame with *ozone.* But these humdrum practices! He often, in act, described the whole scene, suppressing the name, and with much admiration pourtrayed her. "She took the bull by

the horns, gallantly drove up to the door, and faced her enemy!" No, it wouldn't do.

We now shift the scene to a large house in Great Cumberland Street, where a ball was going on. It was given by people Dick Lumley had never heard of; but he would have gladly gone there for an hour or so on the chance of meeting a friend or two. They were wealthy, "semi-decent people"—a favourite phrase of his—moneyed and fat, with "the garlic of trade about them." Their name was Mannock—the present Mr. Mannock's father had been in Birmingham, but not the son, so that they were of an order higher than Mr. Hardman, and he looked up to them accordingly. He determined to go in state, as it were, and went up to town to attend it.

The party arrived, and were announced as "Mr. Hardman, Mrs. Labouchere, Mr. Talbot!" The latter gentleman was "brought," an invitation having been procured for him. It was "ages" since he had been out in this fashion, and he now felt happy. Indeed, it was fast opening on him that he been misusing precious years of his life, living down in a mine, as it were, throwing away precious opportunities of enjoyment. The dazzling lights, the inviting air of the place, the lovely *houris*, so seemed to him, flying round to the exquisite music of the German Valse, all entranced him. Mrs. Labouchere, sitting beside him, pointed out all the "queries," found out their names, asked him his opinion of the "pretty people" present, and seemed eager to please and amuse him.

One of the old *passions* of the Beauty was valsing, a pastime he had not enjoyed for many a year.

The musicians were playing one of those new strains, so tender, so sad, so feverish, so wild, soft and enticing, which Germans alone seem to have the gift of composing for the dance, and in which, of Germans, the charming Güngl, and the almost divine Strauss, excel their countrymen. The exquisite art of such compositions is not on the surface. Those who enjoy them most, and feel their many twinkling feet floating on, obedient as to a magician's call, only know the results. In the beat and measure, the consummate masters find their account: they know the mysteries which that simple *tempo* holds in itself; they can make it lag, or struggle to get forward, like a fiery horse champing

at his bit: then bring back their original air, winding out sadly, like some beckoning Undine, who must go home, and touchingly wooes us on. In this trifling "only a Valse," there is enshrined a world of true music, which, heard on the grand orchestras for which they were written, and led by a genius, is something to dream of. "Yes," some lisping child of vacuity will say, cordially endorsing this view, "a canter to the *Mabel*, or the *Guards* nothing approaches that!" But these and their fellows are mere tunes, and bear the same relation to one of the German masters, that an English ballad, say the Beauty's "Lingering Smile," would to one of Rossini's or Mendelssohn's songs.

Some such bewitching strain began to draw gently the Beauty's ladylike feet, as

if with a magnet. It made him see himself as in some magic glass, as he used to be years ago, floating round with some Lady Mary, the lights of the room in parallel rings, clouds under his feet, and the sweet, dying fall inviting him on to fly—fly, until he dropped. In those days he knew not fatigue or exhaustion—it was most sweet toil; the night was too short, though it began at eleven, and glided on till four, half-past four, and sometimes five: when he used to stand out under the porch, the morning, fresh and blue, his eyes blinking at the sun, the keen air making him shrink, and his throat feeling chill behind his white tie; while a glance upward showed him the windows, with the yellow light of the ball room behind—an almost absurd anachronism. These thoughts all came pouring

back on Mr. Talbot; and when the lady of the house, Mrs. Mannock ("Mrs. John Mannock at home"), stood bridling before him, asking would he not let her introduce him to a partner? he looked eagerly and wistfully at Mrs. Labouchere.

"Do go and dance—you must not be tied all night to an elderly woman like me. Do go; Mrs. Mannock will introduce you to some charming girl."

He went, and was presently flying round the room with some young girl, from whom the fact *had been concealed* that he was married—such an introduction to a professional *danseuse* being an unpardonable sin. It is like a physician's valuable time—worth so many guineas an hour to him—all thrown away; and such deceit is fruitful in tossing heads and

scornful looks. How he enjoyed it, revelled in it! He seemed to be swimming in the old sweet waters of bliss. Foote and Kenney's band—a slender extract rather—was furnishing the music. Flushed and ecstatic he returned to his friend.

"Why, we do not know a tithe of your accomplishments," she exclaimed, in what seemed to the Beauty an uncontrollable and extorted burst of admiration. "You are a charming dancer; so easy, and really graceful. I see there is none of the cavalry trot in your style."

Much pleased, the Beauty said, "Oh, I was frantic about dancing once. *They* used almost to engage *me*. But that was years ago."

"Scarcely wonderful," she said, smiling. "But why years ago? It is a most

innocent and delightful recreation. You are not old."

"Old? Oh, *that* is not the reason, I hope."

"But what other can there be? Do tell me."

"Oh, you know—being married; and Mrs. Talbot does not like——"

"I see. It always comes round, in the strangest way, to that. Luckily I am your real friend, and, as you know, admirer. But that reason would not do for others—the wicked ones, I mean. Some men of the world would say, *raison de plus.* I know my plain speaking gives me the air of hostility to your wife. But what is the need of any hypocrisy with *you?* *You* know that we dislike each other."

The Beauty looked down. "Of course

I could dance as much as I pleased, without consulting anybody; but the truth is, we have given up balls altogether."

"Why?"

"Why? I don't know. I thought it was not the thing after we were married, until our daughter came out."

"How strange, how singular. Why, look round us; even here the room is filled with married men. That good-looking young man dancing is married; so is that other. But you know all this as well as I do. No one knows the world better. These are only ideas that have been forced on you by your long seclusion in the happy valley."

"Oh, I don't know about the happy valley. Of course it was all with my own wish. Would *you*—Oh, if I thought

you would try a dance with me, Mrs. Labouchere."

He saw an eagerness in her face; her eyes were following something at the other end of the room. She was not heeding the Beauty, who was mortified.

"Why it is—it *must* be," she said.

CHAPTER II.

A QUARREL.

A SHOWY-LOOKING man, with well-coloured cheeks and good eyes, dressed in velvet collar and white waistcoat, tall, good-looking, and forward-looking too, rushed across, with a warm "My *dear* Mrs. Labouchere!"

"Colonel Fotheringham! The idea of our meeting in this place! When did you come over?"

"A few weeks ago. I was trying to find you. Do you recollect the passage out? How pleasant it was."

"It was all pleasant," she said, smiling.

"I shall have a great deal to talk to you about, so much has happened since."

"Take my arm, then, and let us go down and get something; we shall be hours telling each other our adventures."

"Delighted," she said, rising. Then to Mr. Talbot, "You must come to me again, and we shall settle all that. Ask me to go down to supper later. Don't forget."

The new comer looked down contemptuously at one so inferior in "build" and "chic," and physical strength. As he moved away, he whispered something and laughed: and an instinct that never fails on such occasions, told the Beauty that this man appearing so suddenly, disliked and contemned him. He himself was put out, annoyed at this interruption, and then felt, for the first time, a curious

sense—an uneasiness at the accustomed attention and worship being directed to any one else. Here was this lady, whose speeches, whose interest in him, whose encouragement had made up so much of his life, just as eager and interested about another! The Beauty was not a profound analyst of human motives, and could not have discovered that this might be the misty precursor of a passion known as *jealousy*. As it was, he became restless and uneasy; and, after a short delay, employed in prowling about, and looking into this room and that, found himself drawn down the stairs, seeking the friend who had left him so unceremoniously. She was hard to find, and at first he thought she had gone away; but at last he stumbled awkwardly into a sort of bower, a retired little room off the return on

the stairs, whose door was ajar, and there were the parties he sought, in a deeply confidential attitude, and an absorbed air. The gentleman looked up angrily and contemptuously at the interruption. These were evidently most near, dear, old, intimate friends: and indeed the affection of a life, and the demeanour that follows from such an affection, have often been mimicked by the delighted and exuberant outpouring of soul and heart, between some well "hacked" young ballroom maiden and her free and familiar military cavalier.

"You said you would dance or come to supper. They are all down," the Beauty said, pettishly. "Do come now."

The Colonel looked at her with an amused smile; then at Mr. Talbot. "Oh, don't think of going," he said, coolly, "I'll

take you down later myself. I won't let you crush or fluster yourself."

"Yes, Mr. Talbot, by and by."

"But you *told* me to come back."

"This gentleman does not seem to know what he wants exactly. He said something of a dance. What an idea! Then a supper."

The Beauty had not forgotten his old training.

"You will allow me to arrange this with Mrs. Labouchere, who is better acquainted with me than you are."

The other's eyes flashed; his cheeks grew red.

"As for acquaintance, I assure you I have no wish of the kind. But I think the not being able to take a hint is one of the most unfortunate infirmities of our nature."

The Beauty made no reply, and sat down next the lady, but on the other side.

"Do come," he whispered; "I shall go away if you do not, and go home. Why do you treat me in this way before that man? It is very unkind."

Mrs. Labouchere looked from one to the other, then whispered, "You *force* me to offend him—a most dangerous man: to make him my enemy. But nevertheless" (she rose, and took the Beauty's arm), "I must keep my engagements."

"Ridiculous!" the Colonel said. "Sit down again. I won't have it. You are not in earnest about this absurd dance, or going down to the dishes below, where the grunters are at work? Well, it is delightful to see such primitive rus-

ticity. This gentleman lives in the country, I am sure."

"It only concerns my friends where I live," the Beauty said, leading off his prey, flushed with triumph and excitement.

"You forced me to do that," she said, as they went away. "I must be a great friend of yours. Some way, I would not have done it for any one else; at least I thought so. But do you know I have a strange feeling towards you, Mr. Talbot. We like those whom we have advised, or even helped in a little way. Now what shall we do? I do not care for supper, though I would not say it to that man. Do you know who he is?—a terrific Don Juan—a dangerous Tartar in that way. He once boasted that he had run away with four married ladies. I am sure he secretly thinks he can add me to the list. He did

his best out at that place. But I do not admire those rough desperadoes—(swash-bucklers they call them in the plays and novels)—though many women do. He is furious at the slightest opposition, and will never forgive me for going away with you, and leaving him."

"You would not desert an old friend?" said the Beauty with devotion.

"I have very few, but I *think* you like me."

"I like and admire you," said the Beauty; "you are so clever. Everything you have told me has come out so true; every piece of advice has turned out so good for me. It fills me with wonder."

"But how foolish for myself, and, you must own, how disinterested. There are people who will never forgive me; but I am not one of those who think one ought

not to interfere. I know no such rule where there is a person I respect and like."

"Respect!" repeated the Beauty, "oh, that of course—"

"I never knew a man," she said, smiling, "that liked being told he was respected. I may not do more than respect; but I *do* respect, and like you too, for being here to-night; and, what is more, others will respect you also. Olivia, as I may call her, will look to you with more pride and also respect, now that she sees you can think, and act a little for yourself. Even my sworn enemy," she added, smiling, "will feel greater respect for you *than she even does at present.* So you see how disinterested I am. As you are to be connected with me, I feel I may take this interest in you, and give you all good advice. There is my father going away,

very impatient as usual; and there is a partner for that divine valse, just begun. Enjoy yourself, my dear Mr. Talbot, while you have youth, and, I was going to say, beauty. See how one forgets."

She went away. The Beauty remained for one more entrancing valse. Round and round he went with a charming light-footed little girl, who never pierced through his bachelor disguise. It was delicious—rapturous; the time about two A.M. At last it was over: Mrs. Mannock's guests were departing; and Mr. Talbot, who that night seemed to have drunk of the fountain of youth, and to have got back to the charming old days, had turned into the supper room to refresh himself.

"I was looking at you," said a voice at his ear. "You seem a wonderful performer—fly round like a dervish." For

a moment the Beauty thought this was a compliment, and smiled. The other was helping himself. "But when you are awkward, and come in another man's way, what does he do? Gives you a push, and elbows you off. I don't choose to have people coming in my way," he added, holding his glass in one hand, and looking steadily at the Beauty. "If they do, I give them a push, and tell them besides, that I think them weak, empty-headed puppies. And if they come in my way again, I pull their noses."

"I don't see why you should tell me this," the Beauty said, quietly. "I don't know you, and I don't care whose nose you pull."

The other laughed.

"No? You don't? Really, now?"

"No," the Beauty answered, with

spirit, "not if you boasted of running off with fifty married ladies."

They were now out in the hall, getting their coats, lighting cigars, and had then reached the door.

"What do you mean by that?" said the other, following him, and seizing his arm.

They were now at the top of the house-steps, with the usual confusion, boys shouting, carriages coming up, and crowding on each other. The Colonel caught the Beauty by his coat-sleeve.

"What speech was that you made? Repeat it."

A couple of other gentlemen, close by, listened eagerly.

"I don't know you," repeated the Beauty, a little agitated, "and don't want to. I'll not repeat anything for you."

"You miserable little creature! you woman in man's clothes! Get down out of my way, or I'll give you a lesson."

The Beauty *was* down out of his way, and walking up the street, the other following, as well as the two good-natured gentlemen, who wished to see the fun. These were men about town. One was a great friend of Old Dick Lumley, and told the whole story to that gentleman:—how the Beauty had pushed away an officer; how the latter struck at him; how there had been an unseemly scuffle, in which they had rushed up and parted the combatants. Colonel Fotheringham was a well-known figure; and the story flew about, how this dashing Lothario, Don Giovanni, Faublas, Casanova, Whatnot, had had a difficulty about another

lady—not a married one this time—with a gentleman named Talbot—a married gentleman. She was the widow of an officer of rank, very handsome and clever.

Mr. Talbot arrived by the evening train with a complacency of "having enjoyed himself so much." With an audacity that was wonderful in him, and which comes with rebellion unchecked, he told them boldly how Mrs. Labouchere "had got him the card." On his wife's side there was a forced air of indifference and acquiescence. She had hardly recovered the shock yet.

"You might have let us known in time; it is only politeness."

The Beauty was quite hostile—primed with a sort of pertness based on the exultation filling his little soul.

"Oh, I declare! So I can't go to a party without coming out to beg leave. I had a most delightful night of it — danced nearly the whole time."

There was silence. All seemed to be thunder-struck; yet, after all, if he did, it seemed magnifying matters rather too much.

"Well, you *are* coming out, Master Talbot," said Mr. Lumley. "He *is* cutting the apron-strings."

An indifferent jest, which contributed, in its little way, to the mischief already existing.

"Strings, Lumley! what do you mean by strings? I enjoyed myself immensely; and everybody says it is absurd shutting myself up at my age—it will be time enough ten years hence."

His wife could hardly contain herself.

"Everybody! who is your everybody? There are mischievous people who say things, and laugh at you all the time."

The Beauty smiled. This was all delightful.

"I'll take care people shan't laugh at me. There was a man there last night to whom I had to give a lesson. It is all over the town, I believe, by this."

"Tell us about that," said Mr. Lumley, eagerly. "What! a *rencontre!* Well done, Talbot. Nothing like that for giving you prestige. I declare, you are going about the thing well. Who was he?"

"Oh, a man you will have heard of—a Colonel Fotheringham."

"What! Jack Fotheringham, the wife killer!"

"The wife killer!" repeated Olivia, in alarm.

"That is, other men's wives—dreadful character; but with a certain *ton.* This is better and better; and our friend here will be a lion. I am serious. To be talked of in connection with Fotheringham is a certainty—well, a certainty of being well talked of. What was it about? Begin at the beginning."

"Oh, it was only a misunderstanding about taking some one down to supper," said the Beauty, embarrassed, and smiling a foolish smile.

"Yes; but her name! Can't you *tell* us?" said old Lumley, pettishly. These things were meat and drink to him.

"Oh, some lady he was sitting with on the stairs. Then he came out on the steps, as we were all going away, and tried to bully and hustle me; but I gave him as

much as he gave, and sent him spinning down the steps."

Livy looked at her father with great admiration. He was something of a hero to her.

"But who was she? Ah! he won't tell, sly fellow. This is what comes of letting him out by himself."

"No; I am not going to tell," said the Beauty, delighted. "I keep my secrets to myself. She was a very charming, clever person; and, I assure you, when it came to a question of choosing between this desperate lady-killer and the very unworthy person now addressing you, she paid me the compliment of not hesitating a moment, and coolly left him there. You never saw a man so taken aback. However, I gave him a lesson which he will remember."

Almost at that moment came in the post, and Old Dick Lumley had his mail of frivolous answers to frivolous questions before him — rambling communications from "dear Lady Buckstone," or even from "Old Tow Row Gunter," veteran campaigner, who was glad to tell her gaffer some scraps of news. Suddenly he called out, "Here we have it all! Hallo, Talbot; they are talking of you everywhere!"

That gentleman almost blushed.

"Ah, and you wouldn't tell us the name of the heroine. Here we have her."

"Oh, I say!" in much agitation; "don't, please. Why, you want to make a row. Just leave it."

"Oh, I understand," said Mrs. Talbot, with a trembling voice. "You need not be at the trouble of these subterfuges.

You see, with all your attempts at concealment, these things come out. I knew all the time it was that Mr. Hardman's daughter. You are very clumsy."

"Well, if it was," said the Beauty, pertly, "I suppose I can behave like a gentleman to her, as to any other lady? Yes, it *was* Mrs. Labouchere. I am most grateful to her, and am glad I was there to get the credit of the thing. She will never forget it to me, she says."

"My dear fellow," said Old Dick, "you are getting unblushing. Not going to turn out a Lothario on one's hands, I hope?"

This *mal-adroit* compliment made the Beauty simper, and move impatiently in his chair.

Mr. Lumley went away that evening, and had a sheaf of capital sketches and

anecdotes for "dear Lady Buckstone" and other friends — in return for their dinners — about "a house where I was stopping, and where a baby-faced husband was growing restive; the wife, a retired beauty, making frantic efforts to hold him. Altogether, it was growing too hot for me," said the old marauder; "and I took myself off as quick as I could."

It would have been too hot for him, or for anyone. For the foolish Mrs. Talbot, at this discovery, had lost all control and discipline. Forgetting the tactics of years, she opened on him with a bitter contempt and vituperation, speaking with a scorn and personality.

"You poor, vain, blinded creature. You don't see through all this, and take it all to yourself. You are being made a mere tool of, and, if I were to speak for

an hour here, would not believe that you are being treated as a mere foolish child. A bit of flattery about these little songs of yours would make you do anything. They have found out your weak part."

"I don't care what you say," the Beauty replied, trembling with rage; "it is all spite. And, what is more, it's not true."

"You are being taught manners, I see, in your new school."

"I have learnt some other things, too: that I have put up with all this too long; that it is very improper of you to address me in that style. I a child, indeed! You are angry that I don't remain one, as I have been. As if I couldn't go to a ball, indeed! I'll go to as many as I please, and not be brought to book by anyone for it!"

"I shall put a stop to it, then," said she. "A pretty apprenticeship I have had of it! But it has gone on too long; the best years of my life wasted away in humouring you. But you'll find a change, I tell you plainly."

CHAPTER III.

RETREATING INCH BY INCH.

An enforced truce was brought about by the arrival of a visitor—young Hardman—who entered eagerly.

"I came to tell you they are getting up a party at the Towers, and will be asking you. You will be able to come, won't you? Oh, you must!"

"I!" repeated Mrs. Talbot, scornfully. "I know we cannot; we are engaged."

"I am not, and Livy is not," said the Beauty. "How absurd all this is!"

Here Livy entered, and the young man took her aside into the window.

"I shall have to go away for a month, at least. They want you to go to them at the Towers, and I want you, too. I make a point of it. Get them to go; a great deal depends on it—more than you think, for me. You know, dearest, they must be conciliated; and yet my sister has a whole catalogue of offences, and seems to think that your family are all bound to some vendetta."

"We have no vendetta," said Mrs. Talbot, in excitement. "I would not condescend to it."

"You see," went on the young man, "all this is very painful for me; and makes my position at home most difficult. Latterly I have noticed that both my father and sister are turning against the marriage; and certainly, unless they are conciliated in some way, it is only natural."

"I shall not stoop to conciliate them in any way. Surely you know, as well as I do, what my views have been all through. I neither courted nor desired this connection. In fact, I may speak the truth to you—nothing could be more painful or odious."

"This is really getting ridiculous," the Beauty said. "It is quite proper what he says. Surely the thing is agreed to; and we must treat them with civility. I shall go, and so shall Livy. She not to dine at her future husband's house!"

"Livy will do what I wish," said her mother, with a trembling voice; "and what I think good for her. So will you, if you are wise."

The young man became very earnest.

"Now, do give way, Mrs. Talbot. I

assure you more depends on this than you think."

"I repeat it is nothing to me, or to Livy. My child has no need to be received on sufferance at any house. The time has come to speak plainly. I have discovered the plans of Mrs. Labouchere; she wishes to sow dissension in this family. She has done her best already, and succeeded, too; and——"

"Oh, mamma!" cried Livy, covering her face with her hands.

"Yes, I know it; and the world shall know it, if she doesn't take care. How dare any woman attempt to set my husband against me? Does she think I cannot see the object of her tricks and manœuvres Does she fancy——"

The Beauty drew himself up, with a very good attempt at loftiness and dignity.

"This is not the way to speak before people, and before Livy. It is not good taste, to say the least. Don't bring in my name, at all events."

"I am sure I don't understand all this," the young man said, confused. "I only tell you my ideas on the matter; and I really feel that something serious will happen for Livy and me, if it goes on."

Half-an-hour after he had left, arrived one of the Hardman great cards of invitation—a vast screen of pasteboard, splendidly engrossed.

"I shall not go, I repeat," said Mrs. Talbot.

"And I *shall* go; and I require that Livy goes too, as her father. Why should you not, after insulting that high-minded, generous woman before her own brother?

I am ashamed of it, and I will not have it; I am not going to be a cipher in my own house. Can't dine out, indeed, without leave—or take my own daughter with me!"

That miserable recrimination went on for a long time. The mother had taken up a weak position, which she could not hold; even from her daughter came an opposition, if such it could be called—an imploring of her to give way, for her sake.

"*Indeed* he is right, dearest,—a great deal may depend on this. And as for poor papa, surely you know it is nothing but his little amusement? I would stake my life he means nothing—it just amuses him, *and makes him so happy*, dearest mother. No, do not mind him. And what I fear, is, dearest, by opposing

him, you will make the thing of much more consequence than it really is. I was greatly struck by what Mr. Lumley said when he warned us of this; and he knows the world so well."

"So *you* turn against me! Well, go; do whatever you please. You and your father settle it between you. I give it all up!"

This was but a prologue to that faithful daughter's flinging her arms about the mother she so loved.

"Oh! this is dreadful!" she cried. "It is making me wretched to see you and papa going on this way! Oh, if we could only get back to our happy ways! I would die—make any sacrifice—only to see you both as you were before."

"That you will never see. I wish I could die here, rather than live in this

degradation—to be under the feet of that woman. But she holds a scourge over me. She knows what a power she has. Oh, heaven help me! That I should have lived to sink so low as this! Yes, dear, never mind; it is not your fault. Yes, I think you had better go. I give it up, and only accept it all. I am beaten!"

Livy left her, with a despairing face; but with something resolved in her heart.

The Beauty—who was rather a childish Beauty, after all—all but crowed with triumph at his victory. He was asserting himself—showing that he was "master in his own house." Then, as usual in such cases, came self-justification. "It couldn't go on: he was not a child; not to be made a cipher of in his own house. Absurd that he couldn't go out and dine where he liked."

That evening again arrived the Hardman livery with a letter for Mr. Talbot; as usual, solemnly delivered before the family, and causing a miserable disquietude. It ran :—

"I assume that you are coming to us, and am so delighted. Mind you bring your song—or *my* song, rather, for I *invented* it, and deserve some of the glory. But there is another reason for which we wish you here. 'Will you forgive me for what I have done?' asked the poor vanquished Colonel Fotheringham. I want you to be reconciled; he too is willing, and you must be generous. He is a friend of mine, and really good; and I daresay you have guessed the reason of his temper the other night. So we must have indulgence. It will be such a pleasant reconciliation

dinner; and we shall have the pleasure of seeing conqueror and conquered, in the same room. We hope that Mrs. Talbot is coming, and *dearest* Livy."

The Beauty so simpered and smiled over this flattering testimonial, and so glowed with honest blushes, as to attract the attention of his wife and daughter.

Mrs. Talbot, beside herself, again forgot her dignity and reserve.

"Some more of that ridiculous letter-writing—to hold yourself in readiness to be exhibited as a jackal—and run of some errand!"

This was a happy opening for the Beauty. It was with an almost exquisite feeling of pleasure that he handed it over.

"You can read it, if you like."

Her first impulse was to push it back:

then to take it, and glance over it contemptuously. Her face grew serious as she read. She stopped before finishing it, and said passionately, "What gross and transparent flattery! *I* never saw such an attempt to make a fool of a person —without even taking the trouble of concealing the attempt. Certainly you are not much complimented. I congratulate you on your letter; and if I was you, I would show it to every one, as you have shown it to us."

The Beauty started up furiously.

"You must not speak this way to me. I won't have it. It's too impertinent altogether. You're very ready with your 'fools' and names, as some one said the other day. When people are fond of using it too much, they speak about what they know best."

"It is easy to guess who primes you with fine speeches; they cannot come from yourself. You have quite a parrot way with you."

"I tell you again, I won't have this."

"Oh, papa, mamma dear," said Livy, wringing her hands, "if this goes on it will kill me. What *am* I to do—what is to become of us?"

"Don't, Olivia. I request you will not speak in that way," said Mr. Talbot, with dignity. "I must assert my own position in this house, at whatever cost."

Another scene—ending with Mrs. Talbot sweeping from the room, with that savage rustle by which a silk dress exhibits passion, just as well as an oath or a burst of fury could do it.

CHAPTER IV.

ROLAND FOR OLIVER.

The party at the Towers was plainly in honour of the marauding Shipleys—a sort of testimonial banquet. That lady and her daughter had indeed made good their ground, and carried away vast spoil from the fruit-trees, and gardens of the place. She had specially marked the head of the family for her own—would pay him visits, and consult him on trifling points in the most confidential and friendly manner. It was "My dear Mr. Hardman, tell me this, like a good creature. I look

on you as a rock of sense:" which was answered by "Really, my dear Lady Shipley:"—"And," goes on the lady, "my daughter Mony so looks up to you; and that nice son of yours, I can't tell you how she likes him. Of course, as he is to be married, and all that, I tell her it is very wrong."

"It is very flattering indeed, madam," said he, much pleased. "You do me great honour, indeed."

"Not at all. And now, my dear Mr. Hardman, just sit down, and tell me about this match, for it quite came on me by surprise. I hear those Talbots are very clever people."

"I say openly," said Mr. Hardman, with a loud voice, "I did not approve of the business. From the beginning I set my face against it. There is no money—no

connection—nothing. I wash my hands of the whole affair."

"Dear me! this is quite a new idea. *I said so to Mony.* She will tell you I said so the other morning. It was impossible, I said, that it could have the approbation of Mr. Hardman—a man who could be anything—whose son would be a match for anybody; and I'll tell you candidly what I said to her then, Mr. Hardman, for I always speak my mind, and conceal nothing—'I wish to Heaven, Mony, you had been married into such a family.'"

"Indeed, ma'am, it is very good of you to say so. I take it as a great compliment."

"Now that it is past and done for, I may speak out. I say it is a good thing to be connected with a man like you. You may be proud of yourself, and

though those Talbots, I am told, are fine upon the matter, and talking queerly."

In this way did this crafty old lady proceed to work upon the manufacturer, and sent him home in quite a rage.

This was the morning after the dinner; and the first person he met was his son.

"Where are you going, sir?"

"I was going over to see Olivia."

"Yes, and be sneered at behind your back. You don't care for that, but I do. You are a fool, and have been a fool, and always will be one."

"How, father? About this marriage?"

"Yes, sir. But I don't give my consent still. If you have no self-respect, I have. I am not going to be insulted—belled about the parish—by these snobs.

To have them sneering here, and sneering there. Then, I tell you what, I have made up my mind they shall have none of my money to sneer at. I'd sooner leave every halfpenny I have to—the Queen."

"But they don't sneer, father — at least—"

"You know that's untrue—you can't deny it, sir. It's too much, and I shan't put up with it—there."

Confounded at this new turn, the young fellow turned away bewildered. He went to his sister.

"I have always had the same opinion," she said. "Do me this justice: I have been above-board in my dislike of your new connections. Olivia is a charming girl: but her mother—well, you know, she don't like me."

"Yes, unfortunately."

"Well, papa has some reason on his side, I think, though we do not often agree. He is the head of the house; he has made all our money for us; he has had a hard, laborious life; and I do think it is very *bad taste* of these people to go about trying to put us down in this way: to be jeering at what they condescend to accept. You are in love, and it is very natural you shouldn't see this; but it is a deep mortification to papa and to me. Even to-day—to be obliged to ask them here! to humble ourselves to her! and all for you. You ought to be grateful."

The youth looked bewildered.

"But what can I do! Rose, tell me; you always advised me. I don't want to be selfish."

"Well, you can do this, at least: what

is, indeed, only decency. Speak firmly to them; require the respect that is due to our family—our *low* family, as they seem to think it. They will respect you the more for it. As it is, they seem to consider you a mere boy—that they can do what they like with. You would not be so wholly selfish, after all that has been sacrificed for you?"

The youth looked grave and disquieted. The thing had never been put in this way before.

"But Olivia!" he said. "Surely you cannot think that—"

"I, of course, except her; I have done so all along. This is no question about her. But there is question of your own self-respect. Heavens, how I have suffered—how we have all suffered! And I tell you how you have a position with

regard to them, and are really bound to make some exertions and see that you are respected, by your family's being respected."

This was a new light for the young man, who felt a little humiliated in presence of his worldly-wise sister, and who had put it very forcibly before him. She was right. Livy was all that could be wished; but he was under no obligation towards the rest of the family. And he recalled now the implied tone, and the scarcely concealed contempt, with which Mrs. Talbot spoke of them before him.

When it was time to set out for the dinner party, the Beauty was confounded, and "put out," by seeing his wife come down splendidly dressed, and looking really magnificent. Excitement, or anger,

gave the tender flush to her cheeks, which was her charm in the days of Mr. Chalon, and the old light seemed to have come back to her eyes. She had, besides, the true refined stateliness—the air of the high-bred lady.

"I thought you were not going," said the Beauty, angrily.

"I persuaded her, Beauty dear; so we are all going together, and mean to have such a pleasant night."

They were very silent as they drove along, the Beauty much out of humour at his not being allowed to perform alone on his favourite boards. "This was the way in which he was always interfered with."

When the Talbots arrived they found that they were late, and that all the company were assembled—Lady Shipley al-

ready enthroned, as it were, in a divan, and talking volubly. Mr. Hardman had quite a displeased air; indeed, he had been inflamed by a speech of that lady.

"At all the great houses in town, as you know, my dear Mr. Hardman, it is *the thing* to be before the time Your friends, I suspect, have forgotten the hour."

Mrs. Labouchere struck in—

"We must submit, Lady Shipley. They are our masters and mistresses."

"I dined once at poor Lady Greyplover's, and they expected the old Duke of Banffshire. They just gave him a quarter of an hour, and then went to dinner. He came in a little after they had sat down, and was not the least put out. He knew it was the regular course of things."

His son was very restless, and rather

annoyed. It did look as if Mrs. Talbot delighted to try and mortify his family.

The moment they entered, Mr. Hardman called to his servant, "Now, dinner!" —a shocking barbarism, as Mrs. Talbot took care to show the company she thought it, by turning round with a sort of haughty start. The room was crowded; and, almost at once, Mrs. Labouchere went over to our Beauty and brought him to a pink-cheeked, good-looking gentleman, who was in the window.

"To be sure," said Colonel Fotheringham, delighted. "We did not see each other in the dark. I was out of humour that night."

The Beauty was enchanted at this *amende*. His wife was looking over, and must have heard it. He was growing more important every hour. Colonel

Fotheringham began to talk pleasantly on other matters; and then the procession was formed down to dinner. That meal was a more tremendous effort of state than Mr. Hardman had yet attempted. He had never yet got such distinguished people together at his board. But, though Mrs. Talbot had priority of rank, Lady Shipley was the leading lady. Her voice was heard above all. She was seated beside the host—was now loud, now extravagantly confidential. She ate of everything, and praised everything.

"Never saw anything better done, or in better taste. Charming. And now, my dear Mr. Hardman, tell me about these people. I shouldn't call them *these* people, because——"

She had to be very confidential here,

as Mrs. Talbot was on the other side of the host.

"She seems quite a monarch-of-all-she-surveys sort of person. Even patronised me?—ha! ha! You saw that? Of course, you did. And that little girl is your son's intended? Nice, amiable little thing, she seems; I am sure, she will turn out a good domestic wife."

All this was very low and confidential.

"But I *wish* she had more mark and character; virtue alone will not do now-a-days, my dear Mr. Hardman. We must all push—push—push! You and I have had to do that."

"What you say is admirable, my dear Lady Shipley. No one puts a thing better."

The conversation wandered off into pictures, last Academy Exhibition, very

favourite topics at country dinner parties, where people talk familiarly of such shows, Rotten Row, &c, as if they were in the next street. Mrs. Talbot, excellent actress as she was, being now in front of the foot-lights, was unconstrained and easy, "the great lady" in short; just as if she had no wolf gnawing at her very heart. She was easy, smiling, gay. But it was almost with horror, that she heard the bold Lady Shipley make this remark,

"By the way, there is a little picture in your drawing-room, Mr. Hardman, which shows you have real taste. It seems to me a master-piece, and——"

"Which one, Lady Shipley? I can assure you, I get ashamed sometimes when I think of all the cheques I have drawn for pictures."

"This was a small picture, finely done;

such force, such power, such colours. I assure you, I don't know when I was so pleased; Honoria, too, was quite struck with it."

"Oh, it was charming, mamma. I could stand hours before it."

It would be impossible to convey the arrogance with which he turned to Mrs. Talbot. Every moment, indeed, he began to feel his wrongs coming back on him with fresh force, and some new circumstances were making him regard the whole family with an increasing dislike.

"I am glad to hear you say this," he said, "as Mrs. Talbot was of quite an opposite opinion, and treated the picture with great contempt."

"How, why?" said Lady Shipley, leaning forward; "I am sure she is too good a judge."

"This is the most astonishing mistake," said Mrs. Talbot, looking round; "on the contrary, I admired it immensely: in fact, I said it was worth all the rest of the collection."

"Oh, how severe!" said Lady Shipley. "What a wicked stroke."

"My collection is good, and can take care of itself," said he, growing red. "No one can say I have not encouraged art. The cheques I have drawn for pictures could not be exceeded by any nobleman in the country. I have outbid dukes and lords before now."

"But now, as a matter of curiosity, Mrs. Talbot; why don't you like the picture?"

"I *do* like it. I think it the prettiest thing I have seen for a long time——"

"But Mr. Hardman says something about contempt."

"Oh, that did not refer to the merits of the picture. If Mr. Hardman insists——"

Mrs. Labouchere saw to what all this was leading up, and she came sweeping down hotly to the rescue, like a dashing troop of cavalry. "Papa is too modest to tell that story; but I shall for him. He saw how much it was admired, and was generous enough to bring it himself, as a present. Mrs. Talbot knows that this was the case. It is always easy to mortify, when you get such an advantage as that. Poor papa! it was a very unkind return."

"To decline a present! Mr. Hardman was, indeed, kind enough to bring it in his carriage. But it was impossible for me to accept it."

"How kind of you, Mr. Hardman,"

said Lady Shipley, enthusiastically. "What a charming man! You are quite gallant."

"It seems not," he said. "But it was well meant; let us say no more about it."

"Oh, but it is so interesting. I am afraid there are very few people who would offer *me* pictures."

"Would you let me make a beginning, Lady Shipley?" said he, hesitating. "As you picked out, and admired the picture, I should be too proud if you would let me send it over——"

"No; but if you would bring it over yourself," she said, in a sort of flattering way. "If you would do *that!*"

"To-morrow, if it should be convenient, I shall certainly have the honour," he answered, looking round with pride and defiance at Mrs. Talbot.

That lady bit her lip.

"People take different views about presents. I believe it is considered that a short acquaintance does not admit of the acceptance of one. Of course it may be different in this case."

All this time Mr. Hardman's son had been listening with a sort of impatience and restlessness — distracted from his bounden attentions to the young lady next him. She saw and wondered at his distraction. At this point he said, warmly, "I *do* wish your mother would not go on in that way. It is making me quite unhappy. Surely you have interest with her, and affection for her, and a word from you would show her how foolish it is."

"But mamma does nothing," said Livy, her soft eyes turning to him. "You

know that yourself. It does not come from *her*."

"But it is so unmeaning," he went on, growing more eager. "Why should she set up *despising* our family and affronting my father, who *is* my father, in that way. Surely you must see, as they say, that despising him, is despising me. If she thinks our family worthy of being connected with her, she should think it worthy of being treated with ordinary respect."

"It is very strange to hear you say this to me. Why do you not go at once, and say it to mamma herself?"

"Because it will come better from you. And it is really growing into a very important and serious matter. You must consider one's family, and if one loses one's self-respect, you know——"

"This is all quite new from you," said she, much hurt; "there is no need to begin preaching at me in that way. Why should you not keep your self-respect?" she added, with glowing cheeks. "By all means do so. But shall I tell you what I have been thinking: that my heart bleeds and burns to see the way my darling mother is treated. The humiliation she has to suffer on my account, and the annoyance given her, *through all that she holds most dear.* You will understand me. I see it more and more every moment, all that she is forced to suffer, and it seems to me most cruel to her. It is done on purpose; I see it."

She spoke so excitedly that he turned and followed her eyes, and he saw that his sister and her father were engaged in

eager conversation, and that on the Beauty's face was that conscious, and half foolish air which betokened some compliment paid, and much satisfaction on its receipt. The sight kindled her yet more.

"I might call on you," she went on, "to make a change in all this, as it is not becoming that your family should bring trouble into ours, and require you to separate yourself altogether from all those who are trying to make mischief in ours."

"Oh, as for that," said the young man, "we must go back to those who began it. I must own, and it is only justice to say so, that it was Mrs. Talbot commenced by despising our family. We owe a respect to ourselves, and you would not respect me if I put up with all that."

"Put up with all that," she repeated, wondering; "this is all very strange."

He felt he had spoken too brusquely, and, as usual in such cases, with persons of not very strong minds, chose to justify himself, instead of withdrawing.

"Oh, really, I am serious, and that depends on you as much as on me. My father is behaving wonderfully, considering. You heard even since dinner began, what Lady Shipley said about the picture —how delightedly she received the offer. He has acted in a very straightforward way with me, and intends, I know, though I am going against all his wishes in this matter—and I do not regret it a moment, understand me, and never shall, though I speak in this way—he means, I under-

stand, to behave in the handsomest way to me. It is to make not the slightest difference in his arrangements for our settlement in life. Now the least return I can make him, is to see that he is properly treated, and with the respect that is due to him."

The gentle Livy felt an inexpressible soreness at her heart as she listened to this new strain—it was so practical, and even cruel. She only said, after a moment's pause,—

"Don't let us talk any more of this; now, at least."

That Colonel Fotheringham had noted this graceful and interesting young girl, who was so utterly thrown away upon "that lout," who plainly did not understand the true town-bred fashion of treat-

ing such precious objects; and he made a resolution, which he afterwards hoped to carry out.

CHAPTER V.

BEATEN BACK.

MEANWHILE the dinner went on, the Beauty really "coming out," as he thought; and Mr. Hardman more and more devoted to Lady Shipley. Every moment was heard his hoarse, grating voice, tuned to obsequiousness,—

"Your ladyship makes me feel quite proud. No?"

"Ah, I declare, my dear Mr. Hardman, I wish we had more people like you."

This was, indeed, a sincere wish on her part.

"A man of your liberal ideas should be more before the country; we should have your opinions given publicly. You should teach us. Men like you know more of the world. What noble grapes! Why, Lord Wiganthrope, who pays something fabulous for every bunch he eats, and who has them all the year round, has no finer."

Here was a longed-for opportunity: the august gardener, who came to him from Lord ——, with the duke's coachman, who disdained to break down the barriers between his own office and other menial ones, and whom no one would dare—least of all his master—to ask to attend, were then introduced upon the scene.

At last the ladies went upstairs, and after a time the gentlemen followed.

Again Lady Shipley was brought forward to the place of honour, and done profound homage to, in the most abasing way. Father and daughter joined in total overlooking of Mrs. Talbot. Her husband's opinion was asked on every point, with a deference that really seemed obsequiousness; and his declarations were listened to with an attention that might at an earlier period of his life have amazed him. No one was more anxious for these opinions than his late opponent, Colonel Fotheringham; and there was a generous adherence in that officer, which showed that he wished to make up for his previous behaviour.

Mrs. Talbot was overlooked, neglected, in comparison with the great Lady Shipley, before whom Mr. Hardman literally prostrated himself. His manner to Mrs.

Talbot since the acceptance of the picture had become almost insolent, and, at least, brusque. Before, he had always had the uneasy feeling in reference to this little transaction that he might have made a sort of mistake, and that his chastisement was more or less deserved. But now Lady Shipley's kindness had removed every doubt of the kind. It came on him suddenly that he had been insulted, outraged, and humiliated; and he could *never forgive it.* Mrs. Labouchere saw this change in her father, and seconded it ably. Our Livy's eyes seemed to see it more clearly every instant.

When Mr. Hardman came up he went over pompously to Lady Shipley.

"We are so happy to have you here, my Lady Shipley. It is pleasant to find

such good taste. Come, ma'am, let me show you your picture."

"I will take it away with me this night. I won't let it out of my sight, or you may change your mind, and offer it again to Mrs. Talbot."

"No, he will scarcely do that," said Mrs. Labouchere. "Poor papa was quite punished enough."

Mrs. Talbot was losing all her old skill in the *Bandillero* line.

"There is a difference," she said, with a trembling voice, "between good-nature and other motives. How do you know that picture was offered to me from good-nature?"

"It is to me," said Lady Shipley; "and it is the nicest compliment that has been paid to me for years."

"You have been acquainted with Mr.

Hardman only a few weeks, I believe?" she said, with great contempt.

"Oh, as for that," said the other lady, coolly, "I have often made a valuable friendship in a day. There is such a thing as love at first sight; and why not friendship? There's Mr. Talbot, looking as if he agreed with me."

"It's a *beautiful* picture, Lady Shipley," he said, with wisdom; "and I think she must have been dreaming when she refused it. Such a miss—it is quite provoking!"

"I always said, papa, if Mr. Talbot had been at home, your picture would have been lost to you for ever. He was too sensible to let such a chance slip."

"Everybody seems to be down on you, Mrs. Talbot," Lady Shipley said; "even your husband."

Oh, poor Livy!—her cheeks burning with shame and sympathy, her eyes flashing with indignity—she could have sunk into the earth. Her young lover—half discontented, as if he was disappointed at her new-born independence, remained aloof. She called him over.

"Listen, when I get home to-night," she said, "I shall write to you."

"About what?" he asked. "Why not tell me now?"

"I shall find it easier to write. All this is growing unendurable. I begin to see what I never saw before. You must choose your side. Everybody that is not with me, and with mine, is against me."

At this moment the Beauty was being led over to the piano, praised by no one so much as by Colonel Fotheringham. He was called on for his famous song. He

must sing it. He was not at all indisposed. Who was to accompany the famous song? He would have to accept his wife. She knew that; and, with a curling lip, hesitated whether she should consent. There was a short struggle. She might give him a lesson—put him down; it would do him good. She would be no slave. It was time that she should vindicate herself. Still, it seemed a petty shape of revenge. It was unworthy of her; so she rose up for the duty.

Suddenly Mrs Labouchere stepped forward, with a smiling air.

"My song; *my* song. It is my patent, and I really *must*. You must allow me, Mr. Talbot."

Immensely flattered, the foolish Beauty replied,—

"Oh, yes. No one has such a good

title as you, Mrs. Labouchere. Oh, if you would only——"

"Would she? Of course she must," Mr. Hardman said. "Lord Bindley said as much at Bindley."

"Of course," said Mrs. Labouchere to Mrs. Talbot, "if you *insist*, I must give up my hobby. Indeed, I feel I ought."

"What nonsense!" said the Beauty, impatiently. "I can't sing it to any one's accompaniment but yours."

Olivia was beside him, and whispered,—

"Oh, poor mamma. Don't!"

He turned round angrily.

"It is intolerable," he said. "I'm not going to be made a child of!"

Mrs. Labouchere caught the words, "a child."

"Who will be bold enough to do *that?*

No, you have too much spirit. *I* should not venture on such an attempt."

Something in her look, something in her tone—so meaning, so overflowing with significance—struck Livy, that it almost filled her heart with terror; for in that moment the wings of the scene seemed to be drawn away, and there seemed to be revealed at her feet the abyss before her family, with all its dangers and terrors. It struck a perfect chill to her young soul, from the suddenness and unexpectedness of the view. There, at the edge—instead of the agreeable, conventional lady of society — was a hideous, ever-leering siren, whose cold fingers seemed to clasp his arm, and try to drag him over, with a hideous marine coquetry. While he——well, he was her foolish, good-natured Beauty of a father.

His song, however, was sung — was received with the usual absurd enthusiasm; and Lady Shipley rose up, and rushed over to congratulate. She—unconsciously, perhaps—drove one more nail into the coffin of their domestic happiness.

"My dear Mr. Talbot, you have a divine voice. How Mrs. Talbot must be enchanted at hearing you entertain your friends in this way. It must be charming for her."

Mrs. Labouchere was more and more emboldened.

"A prophet, or a singer, is nothing in his own country, or *at home.* We found out Mr. Talbot, and brought him forward. Mrs. Talbot is quite too diffident about his merits. By-and-by, we shall make him burst on the *London*

public. I am laying the train already, Mr. Talbot. We know people that will be enchanted to hear you sing, that will get up parties for you—regular concerts. I say, and Lady Shipley thinks so, too, that it is a shame to have such a voice buried in the suburbs. He must be brought out."

"Oh, he must be brought out," said Lady Shipley.

Delightful all this for the Beauty, who seemed to murmur and quiver with satisfaction—not very distinctly though. Terrible almost for Mrs. Talbot, who had lost all her power of cut and thrust, either from helplessness, or from want of spirit. Something of her old training did not desert her.

The guests clustered round; Colonel Fotheringham—now an ardent friend and

admirer—led him over, and once more the blushing Beauty gave out his famous song. A perfect roar of applause greeted it, for, under pressure of his wrongs, and stimulated by public support, he gave it out with unusual fire. He seemed to himself as if he was the statue of some public man on a pedestal: and it was wonderful the secret indignation he felt towards those who grudged him his popularity.

Mrs. Talbot, whose nerves and moral muscles seemed to be relaxing every hour, sat afar off, writhing almost as her enemy sat at the piano, and played without expression, and every now and again looked up with smiling approval and approbation into the face of the gentleman she was accompanying. Never had he sung so well, Mrs. Labouchere told

him: with low encouragement, "beautiful! charming!" audible even to his wife's ears, stimulated him. And at the end, flushed, victorious, he stood there, the centre of universal acclaim, and felt a resentful feeling against those who would not lend him their sympathies in his triumph.

When he was done, she rose up to go. She interrupted the chorus of "charming!"—"admirable!" by asking for their carriage. Mrs. Labouchere, without rising from the piano, said carelessly, "Why we are only beginning the night; we are going to have more songs."

"So sorry," said Mrs. Talbot, with trembling lips, "to interfere with your plans, but it is late."

"Not at all," said the other; "quite early, I assure you. We can't spare

you, Mr. Talbot, I assure you. Can we, Lady Shipley?"

"My dear, he is a treasure. Such an organ! I assure you, Mrs. Talbot, you don't half value him, not half. Oh, sing on, sing us more of your little things, Mr. Talbot."

"We must go," said Mrs. Talbot, turning to her husband; "would you ask for the carriage?"

"Oh, folly, nonsense!" he said, in a testy whisper. "Don't make a fool of yourself. You are ridiculous."

"*What?*"

"Don't make yourself a *fool*," he repeated, his eyes flashing, and forgetting all his usual traditions of the gentleman; "*you* may go home if you like."

"You would not let us go by ourselves, would you?"

"I don't mean to stir. I'm not a child to be ordered home in this way!"

Livy heard all this, every word. So did her lover, or her *late* lover, who made a remonstrance.

"Do stay a little longer. They are all doing so."

"I tell you what," Mrs. Labouchere said suddenly, as if from an inspiration; "Lady Shipley will leave Mr. Talbot at home; that will satisfy Mrs. Talbot. Won't it?" she added, addressing that lady with a sort of mocking and smiling air. "Poor Mr. Talbot, he has all our sympathies. The school-gates are shut, I suppose, at midnight, and the master flogs all the truant boys."

"Oh, how funny!" he said, "but I assure you not at all. There is no master and no flogging. I am going

home with Lady Shipley. Tom will be quite enough to take care of you."

"Papa, papa!" whispered Livy, in an agitated way. "Oh, you will come, you must come!"

He turned on her with an angry look. But he said nothing, and turned away. Mrs. Talbot carried out the poor attempt at a smile, and at indifference. Mrs. Labouchere, as it were, pressing on her, as she retreated, yet still restrained by perfect politeness, fired the last gun.

"We shall take care of him. Perhaps we shall keep him prisoner, and not let him back till to-morrow."

"Stay the night; I declare a very good idea," said Mr. Hardman. "My dear Talbot, use no ceremony. We could put up regiments here."

The unfortunate Mrs. Talbot could not endure much more of this; all her strength and spirit was leaving her fast. She turned to go, and took her host's arm. All the way down he kept chatting in his pompous way. "It makes no difference, ma'am, to us, who stay, or who do not. We have always the spare rooms ready. Your husband would be very comfortable if he chose to remain," &c. She did not hear. He remained.

On their way back neither mother nor daughter spoke. Livy heard her mother's sobs: in the darkness she could not see her face. She clung to her and clasped her again and again, and in that long agony came to a resolution which had dimly occurred to her before now, as the sole desperate solution of the crisis. As the carriage swept up their little

avenue, she had determined on it irrevocably.

She said nothing of it to any one. Her mother was sobbing hysterically on the sofa. She was beaten—could never fight again. The long struggle was over. They were to sit up to wait for him to return.

"Oh! heavens above!" said the wretched lady. "What have I done to deserve all this? It was a miserable day when these people came to the place; a more miserable one still when we contracted that wretched engagement. What infatuation was over us! Such a degrading thing could only bring us misery. Oh, Livy, Livy, your happiness has cost us a terrible sacrifice."

Livy could only think of the conventional fashion of making light of all.

"After all, dearest, what is it? He wishes to amuse himself."

"Wishes to amuse himself! Sport to him, death to me! He is gone, ruined; lost to us! And, Livy dear, I do not grudge it to you, though your marriage has been bought so dear. But it is a sort of judgment on me; for there there was a time when I used to sacrifice others, as carelessly as I am now sacrificed myself. You deserve to be happy, dearest, at any cost; for you have been a sweet, good child, and have done your best to make me happy. It has failed."

All this, it will be said, about a gentleman staying behind at a dinner party, to sing his little songs! But this acute lady of fashion saw further; and saw, too, that the beginning of the end was at hand. That "staying behind to sing his little

songs meant far more." Then her daughter had left her. With a pang she thought how selfish all the world was. Here were two people, and their happiness, sacrificed for her. She ought to be grateful, indeed. But no one could grudge it to her.

Absent some half hour, the young girl returned, smiling and cheerful. No signs still of the Beauty. It came to midnight —then to one o'clock. The gates were closed. There could be no hope after that. The banner of defiance was flaunted in their faces; he was losing even decency. Then a cold calm came over Mrs. Talbot, and, with a genuine Roman stoicism, she resigned herself, and went to her room.

"Tom! Tom!" said Livy, eagerly—she had stolen down—"oblige me by

running up the road and putting this letter in the pillar-box."

Tom got his hat, and took care to read the direction privately.

"She be mortially in luf," Tom said, "that she can't wait till morning."

CHAPTER VI.

A GALLANT SACRIFICE.

The Beauty, indeed, had remained; but came down next morning, feeling a little guilty. He had an uneasy feeling that he had taken some step that was *too* bold, and might turn out dangerous. He awoke early and grew uncomfortable, and went down to walk out in the garden before any one was up, and think angrily over his wrongs. It was growing intolerable. He would not put up with preaching to him before people, insulting those who were kind to him, and going on in that ridiculous, stupid way, which no else did.

Surely that business of the picture spoke volumes! Surely——

"Out so early!" said the soft voice of Mrs. Labouchore, close behind him.

She had a black lace scarf, in Spanish fashion, about her head, to keep off the morning air, and looked brilliant, indeed; —at least, foolish Mr. Talbot thought so. Here was one that really understood him, and he could not but like and feel grateful too.

"I am so glad you stayed," she went on; "even though I was sorry to see Mrs. Talbot did not. Why is it that she is so set against every little thing that seems to give you pleasure? I assure it is a subject of speculation with many; and you are so gentle and quiet, and bear it so angelically."

"Oh, I don't bear it, and won't. Of

course, one doesn't choose to make a fuss about trifles, always. It's not manners."

"Even that old viper, Lumley, said something about training, and all that. Malicious creature! I don't know how to train; I wish I did. You would do nothing for *me*, with all my training."

"I would do a great deal," said the Beauty, proudly. "You can't imagine how I admire and like you. Since I have known you I seem to feel more independent. With you I have spent many happy hours; I assure you I have," he added, bending, by way of his best compliment. "Someway, with you I am always so much at home, and so happy. Whereas, at home——"

"Oh," she said with enthusiasm, "how kind—how nice—how good of you

to say so! That is the most welcome thing I have heard, I don't know for how long!"

"How?" he asked blushing.

"It was natural and genuine, and I like it for that. It is long since, much of the world as I have seen, I have heard such a thing. But can I tell *you*—out of what you must call my own *selfishness*—nothing else—that in that kindness, as you consider it, to *you*, I have been consulting only my own humour—following my own whim, if you like to call it so."

"How do you mean?" said the Beauty, colouring still more.

"You know, then, what sort of life has been mine. How full of trouble, and wretchedness, and misunderstanding. My hurried marriage with *him*. Yet even then your wife interfered; did her best to

injure me. I have forgiven her for that, long ago. She must do me so much justice."

"It *was* strange and unkind," said the Beauty. "I never understood it."

"Did mortal ever hear of such unceasing persecution and venom?" she went on, growing excited. "Ever since that time, it has never relaxed a moment. I can see it in her face; it is consuming her like a fever. You know that it embitters her life."

The Beauty did not deny it.

"Well, then, finding nothing but this bitterness—this hollowness and deceit, on all sides—even in that venomous old creature, Lumley, whom I despise; for he has his cast at me behind my back—it is mean, is it not?—well, in all this cloud of odium I find something in *you*, of sym-

pathy, and myself turning to you constantly, as something that I feel interest in—that I like to think of—that I turn to when absent. I cannot explain this—I know not by what name to call it; but so it is. There it remains; and I should not care were Mrs. Talbot here herself for me to tell it to. There is nothing to be ashamed of. I was a soldier's wife—a brave man's wife, and do not fear her, or any one. She will not intimidate me. Had she, indeed, been gentle or womanly, I should have done anything for her. *Now* she shall not get me beneath her feet. Never!"

The Beauty was quite struck by her brilliancy and fire, as she made this long speech of defiance. Her cheeks glowed, and he thought he had never seen her looking so handsome.

"She would give the world," went on Mrs. Labouchere, "that this marriage was never to be. It is hateful to her—loathsome. She never thinks that it has *your* approval. *You* are above these prejudices. You are not enthusiastic; but, having once accepted it, you are too much of a gentleman to try and draw back. I have seen that through the whole; I have, indeed. And that was another thing that made me like and admire you—your manly and straightforward conduct."

"How kind of you to say all this! Oh, yes; that was what I said from the beginning. Once consent, and then keep to it. In fact I always *insisted*, when I saw signs of her wishing to draw back, that there should be nothing of the kind."

"I thought so," she said, enthusiastically. "I knew it. Something seems

to me to have inspired you lately. I have been struck by the change."

"Yes," the Beauty said, eagerly; "I own it. Since I have known you, Mrs. Labouchere, somehow, I have felt so much happier; and I find myself thinking when at a distance—"

He stopped.

"Yes," she said, eagerly, as a curious, greedy look came into her eyes. "Yes; tell me that."

His eyes fell upon the ground.

"Oh, I wish," he said; "I *wish* that—"

But he could not venture to say *that* as yet.

He remained silent.

She waited a moment, then spoke herself.

"We both approve this marriage, for the same reason. You say it *must* be carried through, so do I. May I venture to say

it? It is time that Mrs. Talbot should begin to learn a little of life from you; and that bitter lesson is necessary."

"Oh, of course it shall be carried through. It is quite necessary."

At this moment came in the day's post —letters for everybody. Some for Mrs. Labouchere; while young Hardman suddenly appeared on the slope, looking a little heated—more angry than grieved. He came towards them hastily.

"See this—see here, Rose. What does this mean, Mr. Talbot? Surely you can't allow this? It is childish, unmeaning; and after all that has passed—"

He put the letter into the Beauty's hand who read it in wonder.

It was from Livy.

"What will you think of me, when I write you what I have determined on, since

being at your house? Determined, I say, after all that I saw there. Our marriage cannot be—can *never* be. I have made up my mind. I shall free those I love from a bondage that is hateful, and causing untold misery: and I care not what misery I cause myself if I do this. I think, too, that you have changed since all this began. As I told you, those who are against her are against *me*. I could sacrifice everything for them. I am made use of as something to torture them. Thank God, I have the means of stopping that. Goodbye. Forgive me, if I cause you any deep pain by this.

"LIVY."

"What absurdity!" the Beauty said, angrily. "No consulting me either! It can't be."

Mrs. Labouchere seemed utterly overwhelmed at what she had received. Her lips were curling with scorn, as she read. Hers ran :—

"Dear Mrs. Labouchere,

"My daughter Olivia has told me of the letter she despatched to you last night. As nothing will change her purpose, I lose no time in letting you know how thoroughly I concur in the propriety of the step she has taken. The whole business was unsuitable: it never had my approbation, from the beginning; but I was content to leave the matter to time. As you may wish to know the reason, which dear Olivia could never bring herself to tell, I may as well say frankly, that she has latterly begun to see things very much as I do—thank God for it; and that

she knows now the object for which the marriage seems to have been promoted. I congratulate myself on its having turned out in this way. I am not sure, but *know*, it will be for the best.

"Perhaps you would mention this change in affairs to Mr. Hardman, and to Mr. Talbot, who is with you."

"Not worth while consulting you," was her first remark.

The Beauty was in fury.

"Never tired of insulting me," he muttered. "They planned all this behind my back. But it *shan't* be. What *do* they mean? What are they at?"

Her eyes were fixed on the letter

"Would you wish *really* to know? Then it is meant against *you* and *me*—against us. There is the whole truth for you,

plainly spoken! She cannot match me at any other weapons, and so she takes this poor way of sacrificing her child. She can show you, too, that she can dispose of the most important matters without consulting you."

"But she shall not. I know what all this is about. It will break Livy's heart. Poor, poor child!" added the Beauty, with new-born paternal tenderness, "to punish her in that way!"

"Is it not strange," she went on, "that this should have come, just as we were talking of that one subject. What a strange dislike," she said, as if talking to herself, "and all because *I* like——"

The foolish smile came on the Beauty's lips. He was still the old *vainqueur*, irresistible, charming, able to subdue

women's hearts to himself. Here was this brilliant, transcendently clever lady, who was handsome, besides, and who had now for this long time past been gradually drawn under the influence of the spell. He was amazed as he looked back, and saw the whole steady course of the affair—her indifference at first, her almost dislike, then all giving way gradually to his seductive influence. As he looked at her, he felt his heart stirred in a way it had not been for years, with vanity and complacent love, and at the same moment, felt a rush of bitter hostility against *those*—he chose to make it plural—whose whole life seemed to be laid out for the purpose of annoying, and worrying him.

Now came out Mr. Hardman. "Why, what on earth is this? My son has just

got a letter from your daughter about this marriage. Well, it is unfortunate."

"Oh, never mind," said the Beauty; "I shall go home at once, and see to it; I shall take care that the matter is settled as it was."

"Oh, I don't know that," said Mr. Hardman, pompously. "I don't want any chopping, and changing of that sort. I wish it finally to be, as it is now. Mrs. Talbot can't be playing fast and loose with us in this way."

"But it is not Mrs. Talbot; she has nothing whatever to do with it. I'll settle it all."

"You, nonsense!" Mr. Hardman said, with something very like contempt. "The thing must remain as it is; I wish it so. And to tell you the truth, I am not at all sorry. Really, all the treatment

I have had to put up with from your wife——"

"But, father, you will not let it be said about the place, that they have put us down in this way, broken off the match, as if we were some common people to be treated any way."

"Oh, nonsense! you needn't say those sort of things. No one can treat me in any way, I can tell you. If Mrs. Talbot," he still would ignore her husband, "were to come to me now on her knees, and implore me to change my mind, I would not."

"This is all because you were in trade, and they think we have a trader's soul. Perhaps we have," she added scornfully, "as they can treat us in this fashion. Now is your time to take your place, and show that you are above this treatment.

Firmly and determinately insist on this agreement being carried out. Mr. Talbot, the girl's father, requires it, too."

"Oh, as for that, Mr. Hardman——"

"I am the boy's father, and I don't want it, and I beg you won't interfere with me." He never minded what he said before the Beauty.

"No, we have not much pride, father," she said. "We certainly show ourselves true children of the people."

"I don't understand you, don't you forget yourself," he answered. "I am going over to Lady Shipley's, and my son shall come with me. Get the carriage round, d'ye hear, John?"

The young man came back timorously when his father was gone.

"I see what the game is," said she. "Lady Shipley, indeed! But it mustn't be!

Have you no spirit, no regard for this girl, Mr. Talbot's daughter, who gave you her affections?"

"But she gives me up. Such a letter to write to me! Besides, why should you take this turn now? You know, you never approved of it, and would have given the world to see it broken off."

"I would. I own it here fearlessly, and Mr. Talbot knows it. He will do me the justice to say I have always been candid and frank to him. He knows how I disliked this, and why. There, go with your father on your mercantile expedition. Let us be traders to the end."

The Beauty strode into his own home with an unusual fussiness and dignity. "Where are they?"—"Send them here!" &c.

There was no need. Mrs. Talbot came gliding in, pale and worn, the marks of tears on her cheeks. The very act of her closing the door with a purpose made the Beauty uncomfortable.

"Now, what is all this?" he began.

"Oh, hush," she said; "no matter about that now. We must see about the future now. Tell me simply and calmly, what is the meaning of this new course you have taken up? I ask a plain answer, and don't be *afraid* to speak plain."

"Afraid! Oh, that is all nonsense. I know you try to make me afraid."

"You poor, contemptible child, you shallow fribble! The proper way would be to treat you, as if you were not responsible."

"Oh, come!" said he, bursting into a

sort of "sputter" of rage. "I won't have this tone to me. What do you take me for? I have put up with it too long; such insolence and speeches, just as if I was a child."

"I disdain to argue with you; but wish simply to come to an understanding. My health is not equal to this worry. I can't be finding sense for you always, and watching to repair your mistakes. God knows it has gone on years enough. It must now end. Livy and I wish for change of air. I assure you, the doctors ordered it to me months ago."

"I shan't have Livy taken away. I am not going to give into this foolish plan. Now she is to marry, now she shan't; such chopping and changing! No wonder they take us for fools. She is my daughter, and the law gives me power

over her, and she shan't stir. No! I will put it to *that* test. I will see who's to be the child, or cipher now. Just try it. For shame of yourself! To turn your daughter's happiness into a—a—means of annoying a person you hate. But I won't allow it. Here, where is she? Let me tell her so."

"No-o-o, no!" she said, rushing between him and the door; "not before her! It would kill her to hear us going on in this way."

"Kill her, nonsense! I'm going to be a child no longer, I can tell you. Let me ring the bell. Don't stop me."

"You poor creature!" went on Mrs. Talbot, in a low husky voice. "I am ashamed of myself, when I think how long I have made an idol of such an object. The precautions, the miser-

able, childish precautions I have taken. I am humiliated when I think of it. You are not worth it an hour."

"How dare you——"

"Don't! don't forget to what I am entitled. I won't listen to it. It is like your weak soul, to have mistaken all my tenderness and watchings, for fear of yourself! Now, however, that is all at an end, and you must speak plainly. What is your course going to be, after this? I know what mine shall be."

"It shall be whatever I choose it to be. There!" said the Beauty, dismayed and most uncomfortable at this situation. "I'm not going to be a cipher in this house any longer."

"I ask you again, what is your course?"

"And I tell you again, I shan't be

questioned, and put down in that way. It's all folly. It's my wish, *as the head of this house*, that we should keep to this arrangement with the Hardmans, and I shall take care that it is done. And they are determined on it, too. Where's Olivia? Here, Olivia, come here."

That poor fluttering heart was not far off. She heard the angry voices piercing upwards through the ceiling to her little bower, where, as every tone was raised higher, it made her young heart shrink. She was down in an instant.

"Listen, Livy," said her mother, sternly. "Mr. Talbot, your father, wishes you to go back on that last step you have taken. Come, dearest child: do what you will about it. Think only of your own happiness."

"Oh, it is only yours, papa and

mamma, that I care for," sobbed the young girl. "It is terrible to see all this going on! I cannot bear it. I do not care what becomes of me, when you, dearest father and mother, are in this way."

"Oh, childish nonsense!" he said. "I am not going to be made a fool of in my own house, I can tell you. To have the whole neighbourhood laughing at me. I think it was very uncalled-for, your taking this step without consulting me, your father,—very uncalled-for."

"Oh, don't, Beauty dearest," she began, in a sort of agony.

"And I must beg, too, that you will stop *that!* I have put up with it too long. I tell you what: you have done a foolish thing, and you must make up your mind to keep your promise,

and marry that young man. Beauty, indeed!"

"Livy knows all that she said to me last night. She will not *degrade* her poor broken-hearted mother."

"I shall be master in my own house," he said; "and if you dare to disobey me——"

The agony in her face could not be described. Now she looked at him, not at her mother.

"Kill me, if you like, Livy!" said her mother. "Think of yourself. I am weary. I long for rest, and the sooner it ends the better."

"Oh, yes, this is very romantic. I know the one who is weary, and who has suffered. I am sick of it too."

"Oh," said Mrs. Talbot, fiercely, "that I could express the contempt I feel for

myself—that I should have thought such a precious treasure worth the guarding—that womanish nature of yours, which could be so upset by some ridiculous speeches. I do not despise you; but I do myself, for my own blindness."

His voice trembled with rage. He seemed to spit forth these words: "You needn't talk. I have heard stories enough about your adventures——"

"Stop, stop!" she said, agitated. "Be generous before *her*. I have been a good and devoted wife to you——"

"Oh, we know all that," he went on, sneeringly. "I am under no compliment because you accepted me. Every body knew the reason of that." The malignant way in which he said this made Livy shrink and shiver within herself. Was this her loved Beauty, and not some loathsome

and powerless adder, trying to sting? Was this what she had loved, worshipped, and reverenced? Oh Heaven above! what was to become of her, listening to these horrors?

The Beauty thought he had brought the matter to a point by his last speech, and like every foolish man, fancied he had struck home where he had missed. "Come, now," he said, with complacency, "do what I tell you at once. Get out the ponies, and we shall drive over."

"Livy, you know me, and what you said to me. You will not at this moment cease to be what you always have been—a good daughter?"

The Beauty was getting into a fury. "*My* house, and *my* daughter! I'll not be treated in this way. Do what I tell you!"

Our poor Livy, with distress and agony on her face as though she were called on to witness a death, and, indeed, here seemed to be a death of all that had been so dear to her, hovered in a miserable uncertainty between father and mother, and knew not what to do.

"A fine mother, indeed, to give lessons! I could tell some stories that I only learnt lately, and which have been kept from me all these years back. You were once a model daughter yourself!"

Into the faded Chalon face came such a flush, so tender, and even modest, as though the unworthy charge, coming from *him*, had forced a rush of blood to that unfamiliar place. The look of physical pain —as though it had been some stab— almost extorted a cry from her child, who rushed to her, and putting her arms

about her, by this simple act seemed to proclaim that she was driven to take part with her against all the world. Into that gentle face came a look of defiance and scorn. The foolish father and husband—his breast fluttering in him with vexation and a little alarm—standing undecided at one end of the room; that fair, excited lady and daughter at the other. A space stretched between.

"Oh, *for shame*, father!" cried she, and it was the first time almost that she used that word; "for shame, father! Oh, mother dearest, I am with you always. I shall stand by you, and give up the whole world for you. No one shall insult you when I am with you."

"Oh, a nice conspiracy," sneered the Beauty. "Stand by each other as much as you like. I shall look to myself

now. I have put up with it much too long."

He literally shrank from the look of contempt on his child's face, and walked —slunk, rather—out of the room.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. HARDMAN WINS.

CERTAIN natures of a weak order, and which by that nature are accustomed to restraint and direction, when they suddenly get beyond control, become metamorphosed, and take an exaggerated bend of self-will and independence. Our Beauty — who, but for certain untoward matters, might have lived all the rest of his life in quite a monastic submission, and gone down quietly into his grave, a placid, rather foolish old gentleman— now lashed himself, as he drove along, into a perfect fury of defiance and of self-

assertion. Bearded in his own house!—a cipher—made little of at home! flouted contemptuously! but fostered, cherished, flattered by those on whom he had no claim. It was scandalous (lash on the right hand pony); outrageous (lash on the left); and he would not put up with it (lash across both backs). In fact, it was not for argument. But what really hurt him—and, in truth, rather scared him—was the sudden desertion and attack of his daughter. One so weak, and foolish, and childish, to dare to turn on him! Never mind, let them bring things to a crisis; he had friends, too. Let them do their worst, and they should see who was strongest. Indeed, he hardly knew what to do—was beside himself with rage and mortification; and felt, moreover, how weak he was.

There was one to help him, whom he found almost as excited as he was: the colour in her cheeks, the flash from her eyes, made her look splendid and handsome.

"What!" she cried; "you have come to me! You, in your troubles; yet I have mine. They have made a league against me in this house; indirectly, it would seem, because I take your side. All the world seems to be going against me."

"*I* am not," he said; "you may count upon me to the last. You have always been my friend from the beginning, and have held to me, and been so kind. Indeed, I never can forget it. But for you, I don't know what would have become of me."

"Where my sympathies are concerned,"

she answered, "and where I see injustice, I let nothing stand in the way. It is my destiny, it seems, for every one to judge me at the worst. I shall make no more attempts to set myself right in the eyes of your wife. What would you wish me to do now? They have been again unjust to you at home, I can see."

"You know everything. At home, indeed—my own home! where they try and keep me the merest cipher. But I'll not put up with it longer."

"They? Oh, has your daughter joined the league against you? A child made to turn against her father! This seems subverting the first laws of morality and of decency. I do, indeed, pity you; and would to heaven I could assist you in any way."

"Tell me what to do. You are so wise, so clever, so—charming."

She smiled.

"Hush! Mrs. Talbot does not think me so."

"No; I know not whom she thinks to be so, nor care not. It is time all this should end. I have borne it too long."

Of a sudden enters Mr. Hardman, much heated, and talking violently. He was followed by his son.

"Things are coming to a pretty pass, indeed. This is your doing again. How dare you—you, Mrs. Labouchere—interfere with my plans? It is your advice that is setting this fellow against me. I am glad you are here to listen to this, Mr. Talbot. A pretty state of things, altogether."

"Father! I cannot stand it," said the

young man. "I have behaved cruelly, infamously, to her—to Olivia; and I am tortured with remorse."

"I don't care, sir; you have taken a course, and you must keep to it."

"He is right, father," said Mrs. Labouchere, calmly. "If he feels he has done wrong to the young lady——"

"That's not the point, ma'am," said he, in a fresh fury. "I'll not have you dictating to me in my own house. You have taken too much on yourself all through. You want to direct my affairs, and I won't have it. I want no one to stay in this house, and be supported by me, and out of my means—after making a beggarly, pauperised marriage — and then——"

"For shame, father," she said, with dignity. "You forget yourself."

"You should remember," said the Beauty, "that you are speaking to a lady."

He felt a thrill as he thus came forward as her champion—a new feeling. They were both persecuted, both cruelly treated, in their own family.

Mr. Hardman was losing all restraint.

"Don't interfere, sir; I wish to have nothing to do with you, or your family. I have had to put up with enough from all concerned. That low, ill-bred insult I have received from your wife." (To his dying day he never forgot the returned picture.) "As for you, ma'am, I'll have no caballing and plotting against me in this house. I don't want you here, and never did. A nice return you make for all I have done for you, out of charity! You want to arrange every-

thing for me, the three of you. Nice work, indeed! But it is time it should all finish—and it shall."

"Have you no heart, father?" said the son, passionately. "No feeling? I know for a time I was as cruel as you; but I see the wickedness of it now, and heartily repent, Mr. Talbot."

The Beauty answered, with dignity, that he was glad to hear him say so.

"He may say what he pleases, and you may be as glad as you like; but it shall come to this. Those that choose to stay in my house, and fatten on what I give them——"

"This is degrading, father," said she; "and before people, too."

"I don't wish to be indebted to you for anything," said the son, vehemently; "this life is growing unendurable."

"I don't care," the other said, arrogantly. "I shall be obeyed in future; and I give you your choice, you and this lady, who chooses to manage everything so well. If you want me to do anything for you in future, you must follow my wishes to the letter; you, and you, too, madam! If not, just take your own course: pack out and starve, both of you, which you will, without me; or you, master, live on *her*, if it seems good to you."

"I shall live on the work of my own hands, without being dependent on any one. Thank heaven, I have made friends."

"What folly you talk; you shall do as I wish. It is time that some one should think of what my wishes are. You can't live on your pay, my lad; and

so you may as well spare yourself the humiliation of a farce of opposition, and of then returning to beg pardon. But as for you," turning to his daughter, "I'll have no opposition—no firebrands—in my house; so I just give you warning. Just take yourself off."

She drew herself up.

"You shall never repeat that warning," she said. "If I was begging in the street, I would not stop you to ask for a halfpenny."

She gave an appealing look over at the Beauty, which made his cheeks tingle.

At that moment they heard the sound of wheels; one of the few visitors, no doubt, who came to the Towers.

In another moment the door was thrown open, and Livy—alone, fluttering,

trembling with nervousness and excitement: it was her first appearance, *by herself*, on any stage—entered and stood there single-handed, alone, in a room full of enemies.

CHAPTER VIII.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

The Beauty coloured and was confused.

"Now what do you want here?" he said.

Mr. Hardman's face grew dark and insolent. She was come to get back his son from him. It was bold, forward, *impudent* even; and he should deal with it as such.

"Now, Miss —— Talbot" — as though he had forgotten her name— "what do you mean by all this? It won't do. I really don't follow this.

I have your letter, and shall hold you to it. A pretty pass we're come to. But I have been speaking plainly, and I tell you, and your father here, and my excellent daughter—who chooses to join in these schemes for her own purposes—that I won't have it. I've put up with it too long. Of course, if that fellow chooses to fly in my face, and take his own course, it must be on his own risk and yours. But, if you like a beggar, as sure as this house is mine, and everything paid for with my own hard money—"

Now our Livy interrupted him, with an inexpressible sweetness and dignity. This gentle creature had hitherto twined herself about the stronger stem of her mother. She was now about to meet the strong winds unsupported.

She was to make her first protest—her first battle with the world, and against serious odds. Her own father was against her. Yet she only looked backwards, through the steel doors of this great Cruel Castle, with its ogre, and giant, and pitiless enchantress standing before her, to where her outraged, suffering mother was, lying—as she knew she was—with all the world against her. The thought gave Livy courage; and, with a voice that trembled a little, she answered,—

"You need be under no alarm, Mr. Hardman. No power on earth would get me to marry your son; I have given him up, and shall not go back in what I have done. No, papa; no, Mrs. Labouchere!"

"Oh, Livy!" said the young man;

"if you only knew how I have repented of my folly! How I was persuaded, I was made to play other people's game!"

Mrs. Labouchere looked at the Beauty, as who should say, "Do you allow this? Have you no spirit? Will you let me be insulted in this way, by a little, foolish girl?"

He interposed,—

"This is all absurd. I won't have it. You must do as I wish. Do you hear?"

His daughter answered him mournfully,—

"Yes, papa, I hear; and up to this day would have listened to anything you might desire. But I owe more to her. Oh, come back with me now. Be what you used to be,

and I will do anything, make any sacrifice, go through any mortification, to please you."

"You should accept this handsome offer," Mrs. Labouchere said, turning to him. "All will be forgotten and forgiven, if you behave properly for the future. I really think you ought. You may not get such terms later."

Mr. Hardman seemed to be master of the situation.

"I think Miss Olivia speaks very fairly, and has behaved like a lady. It is very creditable to you, Miss Talbot; and just what I expected from you. You would not force yourself on any family. Really you see the confusion and disorder all this has brought about —everyone attempting to settle things without me. Quite unbearable!"

"There will be no confusion in future," she said; "at least, that I shall be the cause of."

Again Mrs. Labouchere, rather mortified, and really furious at this repulse by a simple child, interposed, looking at the Beauty,—

"Then you, her father, approve of all this?"

"What can I do?" he said, angrily; "this is all her bringing up. She has been taught to do as she likes, making a cipher of me in my own house. Then, I tell you what, I must be obeyed. The law gives me power, and I shall exert it. It's too much, altogether. Just go home, I request of you. I am your father, recollect. I have some little authority. Just leave this. You should not have come here at all."

"Oh, papa, do not speak in that way to me."

"Yes, I shall. It's growing intolerable, all this. Insulting the friends who mean me well. All that you, too, Mrs. Labouchere, have had to put up with on my account!"

"Oh, never mind me. If I was to count up my insults from your family, Mr. Talbot——"

With a trembling voice, Livy replied,—

"Insults! none from me—none from mamma. She knows that. If I was to count the injuries—the shocking, wicked, cruel injuries—she has done us—and, worse, what she has tried to do—no insult would be too much! But I have given none. But I am not so weak, after all. I find thoughts

coming to me. Heaven helps those who are helpless. Even to-day I see that what I did has not failed."

"You have behaved very well—very well, indeed," said Mr. Hardman, patronisingly; "and we may now assume the matter to be settled. I suppose, sir, after this explicit declaration on the part of the young lady, you have sense enough to see you had better leave the matter where it is. Come with me. I wish to speak to you: and you, Talbot."

And the triumphant, rich man quitted the room, with his son and the Beauty, who, to say the truth, was not indisposed to escape.

It is impossible to describe the look with which Mrs. Labouchere regarded the young girl, now that they were alone together. A curious, almost

savage glance came to her face as she looked at the daughter of one who was so hateful to her; and who, she saw, with a sort of horror, was entering on a struggle with her, now that her mother seemed to have been worsted. The lady's eyes flashed as she stepped forward and said, bitterly,—

"What do you do here? What brings you? Did she send you?"

"I came," said Livy, in her new character, and speaking very fast and tremulously, "I came to seek *you*."

"To seek me! Why?"

"Why? To stop this cruel, this *wicked* work of yours."

"Ah, then you have been sent. She is afraid!"

"Are you a woman? Have you a woman's heart? She does not

know this; but let us speak plainly now. Oh, I own it, you have succeeded — you have crushed down my poor, darling mother; she lies there at your feet. But now let it end here; and—oh, I blush for humiliation as I say the words—*let* him go, and come back to us!"

The triumph in the other's face! she could not restrain it. Yet this was only her enemy's daughter.

"Let him go back to you! Do you, does she, mean to say that I hinder him? Why, he *comes* to me! Can I stop a large stone rolling down a hill, and send it back? Nonsense! You are a child, a young girl out of school. You do not know. You talk unreasonably—and, let me tell you, foolishly. I can do nothing for your father. As for

your mother, who has sent you to beg of me——"

Livy's figure quivered and trembled, as if in an agony.

"That is false—*all* false, as you are. I ask no more of you; and never, as there is a God looking down to protect the innocent, shall I again trouble you. Now I know you; this test has shown me what you are, and that you are an enemy unworthy of her."

"So she has taught you to make speeches to me, Miss Olivia Talbot, or have you picked up these fine things from listening to her declamations against me?"

"But I feel a greater strength every moment. She failed, because she loved him too much; I know I shall not fail, because I love her better than myself.

I do not fear you. I did, I own; but I despise you now. Oh! what a poor, mean, pitiful shape of spite!"

"Despise me, you child! You forget yourself when you talk to me in that way, you poor, weak, feeble thing. Do you suppose for a moment that you can measure your strength with me? Think of your mother."

"I do; but, after all, I have not shown myself so weak."

This went home. The other was for a moment confused, then recovered herself.

"What, having lost your lover—deprived yourself of him! How many more such victories do you propose? But it is absurd talking in this way. I am ashamed of myself for going into such a matter at all."

Livy was still working out a consequence of the speech she had just made, claiming victory.

"And though," she went on, "I have given up my own happiness, it has brought about some defeat for you, has it not? Your father has turned you out of his house—not that I glory in that, or wish you evil; but, as a fact, it *is* so?"

The look of deadly rage and mortification the other gave almost frightened her.

"You do not know me," said Mrs. Labouchere. "On your head be it then, as you choose *to take your mother's place.*"

"On my own head be it then," Livy repeated. "If I save *her*, I am content."

"Save her! Of course, by keep-

ing him to you both! How probable! You don't know me. Why, I have not half put out my strength; and, in return for what you think your little advantage of to-day, I'll crush you. I promise it. There!"

Livy could hardly restrain a cry: there was something so vindictive, so venomous in the woman who was speaking to her, and who now seemed to have quite thrown away all pretence at disguise.

"Yes," went she on, "now you know what to expect; and I go now to give you a lesson."

The young girl was left alone, miserable, distracted, and thinking that, after all, she had only done mischief to the persons she loved best upon earth. She had miscalculated her own

strength, after all. What was she but a poor weak child, as described by that woman? She could only turn her soft eyes up to Heaven, and murmur a prayer for strength—something that would enable her to cope with the terrible force opposed to her.

Suddenly appears her father, much excited.

"How dare you go on in this way? What brings you to this house? What do you mean by going against me in this way, you and your *mother?*" He leant contemptuously on the word. "Just go home at once. D'ye hear."

"Not without you—not without you, dearest father. I cannot. It will kill her. You don't know what you are doing!"

And she ran forward to meet him.

He drew back, with a pitiful look in his face.

"No more of that to me; I don't want it. Let you and she keep up your conspiracy together. Don't think I have forgotten your impertinence to me before her. I'll be master in my own house yet, never fear; and I'll show to the world I am beginning to see the game—the plottings that *you and your mother* have been carrying on all these years back. I was to be kept close, and shut up—to be a laughing-stock, as if I was a fool; while you and she had your own ends to carry out—for fear I should spend my own money, which you have been putting by to make a purse, I suppose, for the time when you and she go out together in London. Thank heaven, I see the

whole of the thing now, and the disgusting slavery in which I have been living. Such a persecution! But that's all over now, and I see the truth at last."

Again was the poor girl all but crushed by this amazing change in him who had been to her all that was perfect and loveable. She could not run to him now, something held her back. It seemed as though some impish spirit had entered into him. Possibly there had, as it might seem to those older and of more experience than Livy.

She could hardly bring herself to speak to him; these morbid changes seemed to her so utterly mean and contemptible. Yet he was her father — sacred name to her.

"Come back with me," she said

again. "We shall do what you wish in future. But fly from this wicked woman. If you knew what she has threatened——"

The Beauty interposed,—

"Not a word against her. She is my true friend. I know why you both hate her, and I'll not hear her slandered. A noble, generous, persecuted woman; her kindness to me I shall never forget. Not a word. All your's and her calumnies shall not affect me in the least."

"But hear me, father."

"I'll not stay here and listen to you. Not a word about her. Never dare introduce the subject again."

Entered now Mrs. Labouchere, dressed in bonnet, shawl, &c., as if for travelling.

Mr. Talbot went up to her

"What is this; are you going out?"

"I am going away, leaving this house where I am no longer welcome. My father has forgotten himself, not for the first time."

"And where are you going?" he asked, eagerly.

She shook her head.

"Out on the world, as they call it. I know not. I am always destined to be a wanderer. I really cannot say where I am to go. I have not thought of it even. But I have myself left; the old resources here"—and she touched her forehead—"which have never failed me yet."

"There is *my* house, where I ought to be able to offer you a temporary——"

Livy's eyes flashed.

"This is madness," she cried. "She may come; but we leave it that moment."

"As if I would accept such an offer!" Mrs. Labouchere said, smiling. "Though, if you had understood properly, Mr Talbot did not make it. He knows the world; but it shows the folly of the whole situation, and the helplessness you would bring him to, when he dare not venture to give his friend shelter. But he can help me in other ways."

"Yes," said the Beauty, triumphantly; "you can count on me. And I am happy and proud to be able to assist you. Come, let us go!"

"What! then *you* are not deserting me, like all the world! You will help

and advise me—an atom now to be cast upon great London!"

"I shall, at least, see you settled there. You shall not leave in discredit. I owe you too much, dear Mrs. Labouchere."

"How noble and generous of you!" she said, putting out her hand. "After all, there is a strange likeness in our lots! Come then; I am too unfriended now to refuse such aid."

With a proud look on his foolish face, as if he were a knight going to do battle for a high and pure lady in the old days of chivalry, he followed her as she left the room.

Aghast, struck down by these gathering horrors, as they seemed to her, Livy stood there, motionless. Such villainy to be in the world was

what she had never dreamed of. She heard the sound of wheels and went to the window, and there saw the pair seated in *her* carriage, the Beauty driving "that woman" away to the station!

CHAPTER IX.

A NEW HEROINE.

WHAT was Livy—what was any one—to do? Misery, ruin, degradation—what was there not before them? Death, indeed, would be sweet. And that dear one at home—was it to fall on her? Heaven send Livy inspiration!

She fled from that ill-omened—nay, accursed—house, not daring to look back; and got home—how she knew not. Her miserable mother, lying on the bed, despairing of everything, had been expecting her—longing for her,

hoping for *something*, her worldly soul having still a confidence in the power and strength of this young and unhackneyed creature, so simple and innocent. Her old training had all failed, her powers of acting were gone—it was scarcely worth the candle by which her long, long game had been played. What was life to her? And her very despair at being thus worsted made everything seem to her more miserable and humiliating than, perhaps, it was. There she lay on her sofa, the former *belle*, all hope fled. And it was there her daughter found her.

"Where is he?" were Mrs. Talbot's first words. "No, I see. What could you do, a child, weak and inexperienced?"

Mother and daughter were in a mo-

ment mingling tears and hysterical sobs.

"I shall bring him back yet, dearest," whispered Livy; "I feel a strange strength and confidence here. Something tells me I am not abandoned by all. Will you leave it to me? As yet I have done nothing. I have only met that cruel, wicked woman, who has openly threatened us. Oh, dearest, leave it all to me. She has roused a spirit in me that will save us all yet!"

"My darling, what can you do? This is sent to me as a chastisement for all my old follies, and my foolish life spent in the childish triumphs of fashion. No; it is useless struggling. I can only submit, and accept what is sent me. I am ill, too. They used

to laugh at me, when I talked of my nerves; but my whole body is wrung, and tortured, and quivering. Would to God I was out of it, and at rest!"

"Ill, dearest? You do not feel ill? We must have the doctor."

There was, indeed, a strange, worn, and fretted look in her face, that spoke of illness, and that scared the daughter. Still she knew that the true physician and the only cure, was to be found by her, and to be found in happiness and peace of mind.

"Trust in me," she said; "and for this once. I am weak, I know; but I am beginning to find out where my strength is. Just wait for one day. Let me leave you till evening, and then —we shall see!"

"Do what you will, dearest. What

can I say or advise? For now I begin to see that my old elaborate wisdom is nothing but sheer folly, after all. I have little hope in anything now. But go, dearest!"

In a few minutes, Livy—our new heroine—had her bonnet on, her maid equipped, and they were driving to the station "to catch the train," she in a flutter, full of the grand designs that were before her. She was so engrossed with these, that she did not notice an acquaintance—a gentleman whom she had met before, at The Towers, and whom the flush on her cheeks, the excited sparkle in her eyes, at once attracted. He had got out of the train which had crossed the other at that place, and he suddenly went and entered the one that was returning to

town. The gentlemanly station-master had put her in a carriage with other ladies, and the gentleman came and required to have the door opened for him.

"Oh, I know this young lady," he said.

Livy recollected Colonel Fotheringham at once. He then began to talk, and in a very agreeable and seductive way; and, indeed, no one had such practice as he had in that art, or had so improved with that practice. And he had a valuable way of inducing confidence, for he was a man of the world, and who knew the world, as Livy—half timorous, half reverential to such—soon found out and felt; and at that moment she felt so helpless, lone, and deserted, that any one, who had

the air of being powerful enough to control and direct it to his own ends, seemed to her more than mortal. He had the art, too, of assuming an air of deep interest, with those to whom he spoke, in their future—a sort of indescribable, half timorous air, which had the best effect. Our Livy, so valiant against the open hostility of one of her own sex, and so shrewd to see the covert approaches of a crafty enemy, was quite simple in presence of this skilled adversary, and felt herself irresistibly drawn to him, especially when he began on that one subject, having come round to it by artful degrees.

"I don't know your father *very* well," he said, smiling; "part of our acquaintance having been made under

very awkward circumstances. But I found afterwards—and will ask you to tell him so—that the little quarrel we had was not altogether one to ourselves. It was ingeniously contrived by another. But to you I should not speak of this. By the way, what do you think of your future sister-in-law, Mrs. Labouchere?"

"No," said Livy, vehemently, "never! That is not to be, I am glad to say; we shall never call her that!"

"I would not be too sure; she is so clever, and if she lays her mind to it, she could bring that about again. Forgive me, I know I am talking of very private family matters. And I declare to you, *she* keeps no secresy in the matter, and speaks in the freest

way, as you can guess. I never met so restless and artful—if that is not too unpolite a word—a woman."

There was a great struggle going on in Livy. She felt that this man knew much, much more than she did. She would have given the world to talk to him, to ask him questions. But then her pride; it seemed degrading. Yet, after all, he had behaved handsomely to her father, he seemed "good-natured"—to a young girl the most recommendatory of gifts. And then there was so much at stake.

"But why should you caution me?" she went on, "have you heard anything?"

"God bless me, no;" he said, smiling. "But the world has. At clubs everything is talked of, schemes and boasts of

all kinds. I know what her boast is, but I would not tell you, Miss Talbot, for the world. I may tell you this, though; she does not think her work finished as yet."

It was impossible to misunderstand this ominous speech, which he made so significantly.

"For a woman," he went on, "she has more power than any woman I ever met; that is, for carrying out whatever she plans. I should not like to make her an enemy myself; and if there was any one, old or young, in whom I took an interest, and whom I would not see injured or made unhappy, I would give them the same advice. You will not be angry with me, Miss Olivia, for saying this to you, for the matter is a little serious."

For a moment she felt indignant that this comparative stranger should take on himself the duty of giving her advice, and she answered,

"We do not fear anything of the kind, Colonel Fotheringham, and want no advice."

"I *do* beg your pardon," he said, hurriedly. "I see I *did* obtrude. You must forgive me, for I meant no harm." On this he took out a book and withdrew a little.

Livy was soon penitent and full of compunction. Worse, she felt that she had done a *stupid* thing. Here was one that might have been sent by Providence, though, indeed, this seemed paying it a bad compliment in its choice of messengers, to help her out of their difficulties.

"If you would let me advise you," he said, in what seemed to her a quiet tenderness, "I would be very much on my guard. I know that lady well, and all about her, and am as certain as that I stand here she means mischief, and mischief—forgive me saying so—that *you* cannot hinder. My friend, my *new* friend, Talbot, cannot either; and, I am afraid, is not inclined."

Livy felt there was truth in every word of those dark prophecies — the difficulties she saw, were crowding on her, and almost involuntarily she cried out, with the most piteous, tearful, and interesting expressions in the world.

"Oh, then, what *are* we to do?"

"Have you no grave and wise friend, no man of the world that you could consult? I do not offer myself, for I

am the merest acquaintance, and I was snubbed when I got on dangerous ground a few moments ago. Perhaps you are going to town now; but I am too inquisitive."

Livy, reflecting that after all she did want help, and cruelly, and that there might be no harm in accepting it, even from this unexpected quarter—at all events, she could listen, and need not be bound by it, after the train had reached the station—faltered out an eager question,

"What could she do? For, indeed, Colonel Fotheringham, we are all very unhappy."

He looked out of the window and smiled to himself. He was always successful—except with Mrs. Fotheringham.

"You see," he went on, "women of her class live always for amusement and excitement. They must have it. They think it a feather in their caps, as it is called, to make conquests, and, once they have begun, they must go through with it. Now, this lady's game, I am sorry to say,—indeed, you must have seen it yourself,—is to make a sort of trophy of your father, exhibit him in town, quite take him away from your mamma. It is something to boast of, and will add to her reputation. Excuse me for speaking so freely, but she does not care a straw for him."

Livy blushed as she listened to this plain way of putting the thing.

"Papa," she faltered, "does not believe that. Nothing could get him

to believe it. He thinks she is his true friend, and is devoted to him, and this gives her a sort of influence. He is so grateful."

Again the same smile passed over his face, and a twinkle of triumph came into it, as a sudden thought occurred to him.

"I could open his eyes," he said, slowly. "I might have it in my power to show him her true opinion of him. But that, of course, would be out of the question. Here is the ticket-collector. How quickly the time has gone? You will not return, I suppose, until the last train."

"But," said Livy, with almost passionate earnestness, "you will tell me that, and prove it. Oh, I am sure you won't refuse me. If we

could only open papa's eyes; he is so good."

Here she stopped. Again she felt all this was so humiliating, to be debating with a stranger—this humiliating attitude of her father, this justifying him, making him out not so bad, after all. She stopped, and hung down her head. The train had got into the station.

"Could I see you anywhere, you and your maid?" he asked. "Is there anything I could do; except what is disloyal, of course. She is a friend of mine, recollect, and though she has not treated me well, I cannot betray her. Where is he to drive to?"

"Half-moon Street," she said.

"Oh, I know," he said. "I often

go there. Old Dick Lumley's bachelor quarter. I hope I shall see you again soon, Miss Talbot."

CHAPTER X.

THE COUNCIL.

Never was girl in such a state of excitement as our Livy, while the cab was driving to Half-moon Street. She was, indeed, going to consult that old physician, Dick Lumley, possibly an ignorant practitioner, certainly a selfish one, who was not likely to give advice without fees; that is to say, who would not sacrifice anything to help a fellow creature. Sacrificing *anything*, with him, was giving away a scrap of his life; because it involved a disappointment, or worry, or stu-

pidity, and, therefore, *injured* the current of his life. For at his age, any mental injury or wear was as dangerous as anything bodily. Poor Old Dick!

People were fond of noticing now that he was changing, angry at having had so often to acknowledge that he had so long falsified all their declarations; that "he was going," or "breaking up," or down. It was amazing, indeed, how he clung to what he called life; that is, to that series of visits, dinners, balls; and when these intermitted, how his pulse seemed to intermit also. Life had, of late, been going very pleasantly with him; as, indeed, his perseverance deserved some recompense. Such unwearied, laborious, pushing efforts, made at the be-

ginning of his long life, and duly sustained, should have landed him in any office or station. But the fatal principle of the Sibylline books applies with its greatest force to what are votaries of fashion, to the children of the world—by the world, meaning dinner-parties, the knowing people of title, and being asked where "everybody" is asked.

As the books of Old Dick Lumley were burned, one by one, what remained increased in value with alarming proportion; and, finally, it was come to this—that at the end of that long ill-paved road, which had been his life, a few yards were as precious to him as miles of the pleasant grass swards over which he had tripped so carelessly when he began to walk.

He seemed to himself now, with the end of his days at hand, to be only beginning. He had this refutation, at least, of the vulgar speech "he is so old!" within him; he felt strong, and a keener sense of enjoyment every day, and his will, and the necessity of "going out," helped him to do battle with, and keep in order, obstructive pains and aches.

As usual, he had, with an industry that never wearied, been harrowing and "stubbing" the fashionable ground; now writing notes, now calling, now telling his stories, now doing little trifles of service for old Lady Towler, or for Mrs. Mantower; contriving to lay those persons under trifling social obligations, to be repaid only by "asking" him.

He was content to accept the smallest eleemosynary scrap of civility, a meagre cup of tea at five, sooner than be left out or not asked. Now, a certain duchess had a great gathering at Kedgeburn, whither all his friends were hurrying, and, after infinite "stubbing" he had received the invitation to join the august party, men and women of fashion—lords, dukes, a royal prince, in short a *battue*, the like of which he had never yet attended. It was elixir to his old frame, the very thought made his blood course more freely through those ancient conduits, his veins; and he was busy on this evening, furbishing up his old armour, looking where the joints had started, and wanted new riveting, amusing himself also by anticipation, burnishing

his jokes and good things, and filing up and polishing a neat, unobtrusive speech, which should delicately attract the royal personage. When his servant came up to say that a young lady was below, and wished to see him, he assumed, in his eagerness and flutter, that this must be some high-born dame come to wait on him.

"God bless me, who is it?" says Old Dick Lumley. "I'll go down to her—or would she step up? Is it Lady Craddock?"

It was amazing how Mr. Lumley could change and recover himself from the want of cohesion, and kind of tendency to fall to pieces. He was one man for the servant, another for the lady, who now entered, this frightened, fluttering, timorous Livy,

who had come to throw herself at the feet of the only friend in town she could think of. She knew he was selfish; but still, to her he had always a sort of gallant good-nature, which might be worked into kindness, if no great pressure was put upon it.

He was a little disappointed when he saw her; he had put himself together for a lady of title.

"My dear Miss Livy, this is an honour to my poor bachelor hovel. Come to see me here!" But he added hastily, sharp enough to see that something would be required of him, "You see me all in a fuss; just setting off on one of those gay junketings. They will have me. The duchess wrote in the nicest, kindest way, herself."

"Oh, and you are going away now—

and I was going to ask you—the only friend I could turn to!"

His first thought was that "this sort of thing" had been the introduction to a very favourite demand on him, and a look of alarm came into his face. Old Dick Lumley never gave money to anyone. There was something, he thought, very low in people, in *real distress*, coming to beg loans, and he could see little difference between them and people in the street. Of course it was a wholly different thing when Lord A—— said "Lend me a fiver, Lumley," which was only a pleasant civility, and the payment certain as the Bank.

Livy soon reassured him.

"Oh, dear Mr. Lumley, give me some advice; help us! We are in a

miserable way at home. Save us!"

"Oh, I suspect," said Mr. Lumley. "I suppose our friend, the Beauty, is at his old tricks. Sit down, then, and take a chair, and tell me all about it. There."

"No, indeed, it's not his fault. But there are others who hate poor mamma, and do their best to draw him away from us."

"Oh, I know that, too. A very clever woman in her way — I really admire her. But now, tell me how things stand exactly."

He put aside his preparations, and set himself to listen. Livy began, told him all; coming down to the dreadful and perplexed state in which things were. It was, indeed, hard to resist Livy's "coaxing manner," which invited

confidence and aid. As she went on he grew interested, and stopped his packing.

"Oh, Beauty," he would say, "fie for shame! And yet I don't blame him. All that scheming woman. I know well what she's at. It's just one of the tricks of the women of the day. Lord bless you, my dear child, it's their amusement — like dram-drinking to a man that has taken to cognac. You see what is there open to women of this sort? What is there piquant but something of the kind? I declare, I know I shouldn't speak this way to you; but it's the fact, I assure you. The world's a very wicked place."

Livy was aghast.

"But why," she cried, "why should she think of this—such a cruel, base

revenge? What can she gain? Poor papa is married——"

"*Raison de plus*," says Dick, gaily. "Married men are the best game, and give a *prestige*, you see. It is bringing down two birds; and, as you see, in this case, three."

Livy was beginning to see.

"Then what, in the name of heaven, are we to do? How can I go back to mamma? I told her I would bring her comfort, and now I see I have worse news."

Dick was really getting sympathetic. With the pretty he was always more or less good-natured. Beside, there were the elements of a capital story, which, with a little vamping and varnishing, would make his fortune at Kedgeburn. He was curious, too, to see the end.

Anything dramatic for the old soul was like breathing fresh air. He thought a moment.

"I'd have supposed that Fotheringham was her admirer, and she his. And I daresay he is still."

"Oh, I know that he is not," she said, eagerly. "He came up in the train with me, and spoke very kindly indeed."

"Oh, you were consulting *him*, Miss Livy. A nice man to take into confidence. Well, I don't know but that you were sensible enough: all's fair in love, war, or filial affection. And now tell me, my dear, what did Fotheringham say to you? Don't be afraid. I assure you it is of great importance."

"Well, he was very kind and interested—I must say that."

"Of course he was; but was he friendly to her?"

"No; he seemed angry or displeased."

"Ah! a point for you. Now I tell you, as you have come to me, that man is the only chance you have. If you can make him your friend, you can do something. And your father has gone up to town with her? You don't know where they are quartered, do you?"

"Oh, no," she said desparingly. "In this great London, how should one—"

"Well, I do. Starridge's is the place. Decent family hotel. Lord Mundy always stops there. Comfortable, but dear. I tell you what, I was going to Kedgeburn the first

thing in the morning; but a few hours will not make much difference. I can go by the evening train. See, my dear. You might just wait here a little while, till I come back. There are plenty of books, and the evening paper."

Old Dick Lumley got his hat, and set off. It was a long time since he had done so generous and unselfish an act. But he felt a new eagerness, which contributed a sort of elixir vitæ to his veins. He tottered into a Hansom cab, with as much elasticity as he could assume, and drove away to his club "Banks'"—where he was certain of finding Colonel Fotheringham.

That gentleman was there, as he had anticipated, standing in the bow

window, entertaining a number of fast gentlemen with some piquant adventure. "Banks'" was a sort of fly-by-night house, where deep card-playing always went on, and which seemed to run eternally with soda and brandy, as other places are said to run with milk and honey. On these grounds, Old Dick belonged to it, as he never cast his net into its waters for gossip without a good haul, which he could carry to his favourite Lady This, or to "My dear Mrs. ——." This communion, too, with young and "fast" men, was one of the conduit pipes through which Mr. Lumley fancied he drank of the Fountain of Youth, and, indeed, of Life. This noisy party, then, he joined, after a way of his own: a conscious smile of anticipating

enjoyment—sidling up until he was absorbed in the group.

Some of these men were officers, who had been quartered abroad; and one was apparently joking Colonel Fotheringham on that point where men of all kinds, degrees, and ages, it is to be suspected, enjoy being "rallied" —namely, what are called their "successes."

"I saw you," said this gentleman. "He was getting out of the carriage with as pretty a girl as you'd ask to meet. The man is lost to all shame. But it won't do."

"Won't do! How do you know?"

"Well, what about the pretty widow? She followed you from abroad. What account have you to give of her? God knows you boasted enough."

"All in good time," said the Adonis, complacently. "I wait always till the pear is ripe; then open my mouth, and it drops into it."

"Won't do shaking the tree," said Old Lumley, thus introducing himself. "But there is another reason, Fothy. Why don't you tell them that she has a little game of her own to finish first? 'Pon my soul, as diverting a thing as you ever heard. Would do for a little French piece at the Palais Royal."

"Oh, I know," said Fotheringham. "That poor creature that they call, or who calls himself, the Beauty—an ass of the first water. I can call him so, now that we have made up our little quarrel."

"Ah, you are sore about that,

Fothy," said Mr. Lumley. "For a handsome fellow like you, with the scalps of so many wives, maids, and mothers dangling at your belt, it is mortifying to play second fiddle to a Jemmy Jessamy of that kind."

"I beg your pardon, Lumley," said the other, pettishly. "Excuse me, you are talking of what you know nothing about. It is notorious that she doesn't care two straws about the fellow. My good Old Lumley, you are not behind the scenes everywhere. You are not quite up to this business. She keeps me posted up in every stage of the affair. A woman of her sort only lives for excitement; and what is at the bottom of the whole affair is dislike to another person."

"Very good—very good, no doubt,"

said old Dick, "so far as your statement goes. But I should like proofs."

"Proofs! A gentleman does not usually show a lady's letter. But," he added, taking one out of his pocket, "if I chose to exhibit *one*—which I should scorn to do—it would prove what I said. Why, she laughs at the fellow, and turns him into the greatest ridicule."

Now, clever as Mr. Lumley was, and well acquainted with the world as he was, and with the tricks of the world, it must be owned that this little episode was brought about by no contrivances on his part. He had raised the argument unintentionally; perhaps with a sort of hope of "picking up" something out of it. When he heard this

allusion to a letter, he was, of course, convinced; and said that made it quite a different thing. And Colonel Fotheringham was quite triumphant.

Gradually the group broke up; and Mr. Lumley was thinking of returning to his lodgings, when Colonel Fotheringham followed him, and seemed anxious to speak with him.

"You see," he said, "this artful woman is playing a game; and I am sorry for the poor little girl."

"But, really now," said Old Dick, "about the letter? I couldn't, of course, dispute what you said before those fellows."

"Oh, I could show it to you," said Colonel Fotheringham. "I assure you, she turns this half natural into perfect ridicule. A very clever woman; but

I would not trust her *that* far. It is so amusing, the way she hates that poor, foolish woman. She'd see her in the workhouse with pleasure. And that pretty little girl, with her praying-sort of face! I never met such a confidential little nun of a thing. She told me all her sorrows; and I am to comfort her and the family. I intend going down to pay them a visit to-morrow. Eh, Lumley?"

Old Dick chuckled with sympathising enjoyment at whatever this speech seemed to convey: then went his way back to his lodgings. He thought the matter over with satisfaction as he drove along, and said to himself, "Not badly done." The story would work up very dramatically for my lord duke after dinner, and cause the whole atten-

tion of the company to be drawn to him. People would never think of "age" in connection with Dick.

CHAPTER XI.

CHANGE OF HAND.

When he got back, he found the devotional face, which Colonel Fotheringham had been so struck with, bent on him wistfully, with a despairing inquiry,—

"What have you done? Do you bring me hope?"

"What could be done in the time, my dear child? Things of this kind cannot be settled right off in that way. We must prepare the ground, my dear."

Her face fell.

"Oh, I know that, dear Mr. Lumley; but I had hoped you would have made out something. I have been so miserable."

"Well, I don't say but that I *have* made out something. But now, you must work a little for yourself, and build upon the little foundation I have laid. You are very clever in your own way, my dear. Now, Fotheringham is not a man whose intimacy is to be encouraged; in fact, he is a fellow who ought not to be let into a decent house. But don't be shocked; I think there would be no harm if you made a friend of him."

This strange advice Old Dick inculcated warmly.

"He is going to see you to-morrow.

Make yourself as bewitching as you can, and he will not refuse you anything."

"But I *could* not ask such a man. It was only an accident, my meeting him in the train."

"It would be the only way to open the Beauty's eyes. You see, my dear child, you must work for yourself. No one can ever do anything for any one, so well as they can do it for themselves. I believe you to be very clever, Miss Livy; and, with a little training, you would hold your own against any of these scheming women. The only real way to meet them, is to face them on their own ground, and with their own weapons."

"I never could bring myself to *that*," said Livy, vehemently; "but papa is

good at heart, I know he is; and if I knew how to reach his feelings! He loves us all, I know he does."

"Well, then, let us go to him. I'll do what I can with him, too. We are sure to find him at Starridge's, her place."

Livy shuddered as he said this; but she caught at the proposal eagerly: and, in a few moments, they were driving away to that fashionable family hotel, where invited foreign princes—in the dearth of accommodation at the palaces of the kingdom — have been often hospitably entertained.

Mr. Lumley knew "Starridge," whose real name was Motcombe, very well, having often dined there. Indeed, Mr. Lumley was one of those people who have a lucky art of becoming known to

every one without exertion of their own—one of those who are recognised by policemen, allowed to pass into reserved places, &c., and yet from whom money is not looked for. With this proprietor Old Dick was presently in deep conversation, and learned that Mrs. Labouchere had arrived there with all her boxes, &c., but that she had gone out, and had not come in yet; but that the gentleman was waiting upstairs. Mr. Lumley and his charge then went up.

The Beauty started as he saw them, much as a school-boy would, detected by the master, in an orchard. But after a moment he grew pettish, then defiant.

"What do you want with me? What is the meaning of this pursuing

me about, in this way? How dare you come after me?"

This was to his daughter.

"Oh, papa, what are you doing? Why have you done this?"

"Oh, I say, Talbot, these are very queer pranks! It must be a joke, altogether. You can't have taken leave of your wits?"

"I don't understand you," said the Beauty.

"Oh, going about in this way. Here, be a sensible man, now. Go back with your daughter."

"I don't want directions from any one. Neither do I require any orders from home. I have business that keeps me here."

"Indeed you have not, my dear Talbot," said Old Dick, sitting down

in a comfortable sort of way. "I am an old friend, and don't at all mind what you say. You won't offend me easily."

"Oh, papa, if you knew the state I left mamma in! It will kill her, the way you are treating her."

"And how have *I* been treated all these years back? Tyrannised over—ground down—kept shut up——"

Mr. Lumley burst out laughing.

"What a description of yourself! No, my dear fellow; we can't accept *that* as a true picture; and I have too much respect for you to suppose that you would give out that you allowed yourself to have lived in such a 'degrading' state of hen-pecking."

The Beauty coloured.

"Oh, you are very sharp—uncom-

monly so. You know what I mean. I don't mean to be laughed at any longer by the world!"

A twinkle came into Mr. Lumley's eyes.

"I wouldn't be too sure of that. Our friends, unfortunately, are often those who laugh the loudest."

"Ah! but my friends don't do that. The friends *you* have been accustomed to, do so, no doubt. It is what I would quite expect."

"Perhaps you are right, though Mrs. Labouchere is not exactly one of the friends I have been much accustomed to."

The Beauty coloured.

"I'll not hear a word against that lady. I know well who sets these

slanders on foot. I have heard enough of them already."

"Oh, papa," cried Livy; "you don't know all. Your kind, good heart has been worked on for the basest ends. There are those who are using you to forward the ends of their own hate and dislike; and all the time laughing at you behind your back."

This was a daring speech for our Livy, and she trembled when she had made it.

The Beauty was beside himself with anger and offended dignity.

"What a mean conspiracy! You, and the rest of you, can stoop to invent things about the noblest of women! I forbid you to speak to me on this subject again; I won't have it. And if you don't both of you leave this

room, I'll leave it. You have no business to come here at all. It is Mrs. Labouchere's apartment."

"Here, my good friend," said Mr. Lumley, rising; "you are quite forgetting yourself, in this ardent championship. You used a very ugly word just now — something about 'conspiracy;' I don't allow expressions of this kind to be applied to me. I think it very free of you," added Dick Lumley, in a real rage; "and very uncalled for. Now explain what you mean. Don't dare to repeat that word again, or any words like it. Why, you *are* a stupid, foolish creature, not to know your best friends, those who would save you from being made a cat's-paw of by a scheming woman, whose letters—where she is laughing at

you to her friends—are being hawked about over the clubs!"

There was something so genuine in this tone of Dick Lumley, such an air of superior knowledge, that it did more in one second to convince the Beauty of the facts thus affirmed, than if affidavits had been sworn with all solemnity. He faltered, and repeated —"*balbuitiéd*," as the French say; "Laugh at me in her letters?"

"Ah, you guess now," said Old Dick, still fuming. "Then you'll find out more by-and-by. Conspiracy, indeed! I'll just leave you there; make yourself as much a laughing-stock as you please. I'll never raise my finger to open your eyes. Come, Miss Livy; your father doesn't want you here, as he says plainly; and I'll see you safe

to the train. And if you take my advice, I'd leave the matter all to time. It is really not worth any extra trouble; and you have done your best, as a daughter, to save this poor, infatuated father of yours from being a laughing-stock."

Our Livy saw that this angry speech of Dick Lumley's had, unintentionally, done her more good than any of his elaborate little worldly plots. She saw her father mortified, angry, doubtful, and full of fear lest there might be some truth, after all, in that statement. She took the cue at once, like a girl of *esprit*, as she really was.

"Then we must go I suppose, Mr. Lumley," she said. "I have done my best, and so have you. We can do no more. We are to have this morti-

cation, in addition to other trials—to be laughed at by the whole town. My poor mother did not deserve this."

Uncertain, colouring up fast, turning pale, angry as a child whose only thought is to break up its toys to spite the parents who have bought them for it—the Beauty looked at them irresolutely. He felt his weakness. Weak minds, at such a crisis, can only find a temporary strength in repeating a foolish defiance. It gives them a *prestige* for the moment. And so he said again—

"I don't choose to be interfered with. I am not a child; and I'll show you that I am not. I won't hear a word against her."

"You are a disinterested fellow,"

said old Dick Lumley, laughing heartily. "You will deserve a crown."

He took Livy's arm in his, and they went down-stairs, she with her head bent low, and her heart very heavy. They got into the cab, and as Mr. Lumley was telling the cabman where to drive to, a lady who was going up the steps looked round curiously, and, seeing them, stopped for a moment, then came down the steps, and stood before them at the window.

It was Mrs. Labouchere.

"Oh, a visit!" she said. "Ha, I understand why! Another failure, even with such an ally as Mr. Lumley! There are great odds against poor me."

"My dear Mrs. Labouchere," said the old man of the world; "you alone

are a match for the whole world. Miss Talbot had no escort, and——"

"Yes, I understand," she said, with bitter contempt. "Well, I have no escort either, and shall want one for some time. You see it won't do, Miss Olivia Talbot. Even in my absence, you can do nothing."

She passed in. Old Dick looked after her admiringly. He was actually thinking he had been a great fool to mix himself up in this business. After all, it did not concern him; and all the result was to make an enemy of a woman that was sure to "do"—to get on.

"Monstrous clever creature that," he said. "I admire her. You see, my dear, there's no use in our trying anything more. You've done what you

could; and she's a dangerous woman to meddle with. Let sleeping dogs lie. Our friend, the Beauty, will tire of this—er—fancy by-and-by, and then all will be right again. We must take men as we find them."

With a soreness of heart Livy found, for the first time, that conventional "hollowness of the world" realised to her. This ancient, whose foot was in the grave, was cold, selfish, unfeeling, and thought only of himself now; and, at the same time, felt that she ought to consider herself under a serious obligation to him for these services.

CHAPTER XII.

A GLEAM OF HOPE.

Livy got home about nine o'clock, and it was a miserable journey for her, down. Indeed, for a person with "something on their mind," there is no imprisonment so terrible as that of a railway carriage, which flies forward so swiftly, but with which the anxious, fluttering soul does not keep pace; and, indeed, now lags behind, now leaps forward, as if eager to leave the express carriage behind. It was terribly long for her, and she thought the journey

would never come to an end. When she entered there was no eager, expectant mother rushing to meet her; but a servant on tip-toe, with a "She is asleep now, miss. Oh, but she has been so ill!"

Livy stole up, almost thankful for this sleep, which saved her the misery of having to enter, and be the bearer of wretched news.

She saw the pale, worn face before her, all the colour gone; the old Chalon beauty turned haggard. Livy sat by her, and watched for more than an hour, when Mrs. Talbot roused herself and looked round, and her eyes fell upon Livy, and she started.

"Well, dear," she cried, "where is he? You have brought him to me? No?"

Then Livy had to tell her poor halting story; and who shall blame her if her desperation made her put in such colouring as there was not in nature, to make the whole have something of a more promising aspect. The woman of the world understood better, and shook her head mournfully.

"I expected nothing, dearest. You did your best. After all, as I have been thinking since, why should I put on a pretence of affection in the matter; why should I try and act a part to you, my own child, who know well that this is all mortification at being worsted by that woman, or at finding one whom I have ruled so long, breaking at last from my control? At least this is what the world will say, and the world will be nearly right; for I have been always

a worldling, and it is fit that I should be dealt with as one."

Ever since Livy had left the hotel, and noted the change in her father—and there was a change in her, too; for all the delicate bloom, which was like the precious green on bronze, was being rubbed away—that curious hint of Old Dick Lumley's had been in her ear. It seemed like an inspiration. All pleading, importunity, and appeals to love and affection and sympathy were thrown away. Those delicate "sweet waters" were turned back, and played on an iron-bound rock, rising smooth and sheer. Already, though, that little head was fluttering with a new scheme that seemed to her all but infallible in result—certain to succeed, if it could only be brought into effect.

A miserable night for both. The mother seemed sunk into a hopeless stupor, and lay there on the sofa. She would not go to bed. The hours wore on to eleven, then to midnight, and Livy was tearfully imploring, beseeching her to lie down. "We would see in the morning." Vain and oft-repeated bit of sham comfort! the friendly night interposing, as a wall, with the poor comfort of delay, as though some friendly genii would arise and bring about some wonderful change!

At last she was prevailed on; and she was going up when they heard the gate bell ring. In a moment the Beauty entered, and with an air half-hang dog, half-defiant, as if brought to bay, sulky to a degree, confronted the

two ladies. Livy, when she heard the bell, had just time to pour out an eager whisper into her mother's ear.

"Now, all depends on this, dearest. It is our last chance. I implore you be guided by me in this. Promise me."

It acted on Mrs. Talbot like an inspiration; and the Beauty saw before him his wife and daughter, calm and smiling. Mrs. Talbot had *acted* many a time before, under far more difficult circumstances.

"We understood you were not returning to-night," she said, almost gaily.

"So you told me, dearest," said Livy, gently; "and I told mamma so."

"You don't seem very certain in your movements," said his wife, smiling.

"Well, you needn't have *sent* after me," said the Beauty, wondering at this tone. He was prepared for a tremendous tempest. "I don't like it, and I won't have it."

"Certainly not; it looks bad before people. Livy insisted on going up to town."

"Yes, and bringing off that man to the hotel after me, as if I was a schoolboy."

"No, indeed, dear Beauty," said Livy, eagerly. "It was Mr. Lumley who had heard some club story, and wished to tell you himself."

He glanced angrily and nervously at his wife. A look of intelligence

came from Livy's face to reassure him. She had not told her mother. What if she had? He was not to be brought to book for everything. Besides it was all "a *lie*" or a mistake; so he could have told them.

"I really don't understand," said his wife. "I sent nobody after you. This is all a tissue of mistakes. We understood that you were not returning to-night. You have changed your mind: why make a fuss about it?"

The Beauty did not relish this tone, and was not a little confounded. He was in a very bad humour indeed. His faith had been rudely shaken. He went out of the room angrily, and went to bed, leaving the two women there.

It was a wretched, sleepless night for

them. In the morning the Beauty appeared with quite a load of injuries on him. He was in real trouble and vexation of spirit, mortified ; and, after all, believing that the two ladies knew well what was disturbing him. The little faint success of the night before had inspirited them ; and Mrs. Talbot, ill at heart, and with an old malady born of her old campaigns, and which she had carried about with her gallantly, much as a veteran would a ball in the leg, had been tortured by it secretly and without a complaint. Only at times of crisis this private enemy ungenerously came out, and added to her torments. This was "something in her side," which many of her friends knew indistinctly by that title. But of late, agitation and the sense of fail-

ing years, and decay, coming on her, had robbed her of some of her old strength for doing battle with such enemies.

The Beauty mooned about, undecided, all the morning. It was evident that some dispute had taken place between him and the lady he so admired, and that his sense of dignity kept him undecided. When he found the ladies of his family dressed, as if for guests, he asked Livy pettishly what they were going to do.

She looked at him with "a cold eye," and which seemed to be a new weapon of hers since the day that she had so boldly faced him.

"Colonel Fotheringham is coming down here to lunch."

"Coming down here?" he repeated

with astonishment. "What do you mean by this? Such a man as that! I don't choose to have a man of his sort in this house."

"It is mamma's wish," said Livy coldly. "Surely you would not oppose her in so trifling a matter?"

"It is not trifling—a man of that character!"

Mrs. Talbot entered now, and he repeated his disapproval.

"I don't choose to have a man of that sort in my house."

"He is the friend of your great friend, Mrs. Labouchere. That ought to be no objection in your eyes."

"That is nothing to me, or to you."

"Nothing to me?" said the lady, growing excited. Livy at once struck in.

"You cannot mean that. You must be just and reasonable. If you deny mamma's right to interfere with your choice of friends, you must allow her the same indulgence."

"Yes," said Mrs. Talbot growing more excited, "as I have borne so much from you, it is time I should get back some liberty."

"O come, I won't be lectured, you are making quite a fool of yourself!"

Livy stepped forward and said, with the coldest contempt—

"You must not speak in this way to my mother. She is too good to you, and has suffered too much. All that must be changed now. It must indeed."

"Must!" repeated the Beauty, astonished.

"Yes, must. She is entitled to be treated *as a lady*, at least. 'A fool!' shame on you to let such words pass your lips. Never fear, dearest, I shall protect you from the effects of your own good nature. If you are not treated with respect in this house—your own house—we shall go out of it. There are plenty of places abroad, plenty of friends who will be glad to welcome us; and when this folly of papa's has passed over—and it will be a short-lived one—and he has come back to his own old gentlemanly self, we shall come back too. But you must not be insulted here."

The Beauty had found a new schoolmistress. He could only murmur—"I *didn't* insult her—I never meant it—it's absurd."

"If you never meant it, then, of course mamma will think no more of it. Here is Colonel Fotheringham."

CHAPTER XIII.

A DUEL.

The Colonel entered with a curiously amused expression. He saw from the attitude of all the party that something dramatic was taking place—the nature of which he readily guessed. Livy's eyes glittered, and her cheeks coloured, as he appeared; for she had begun to look on this man as one about whom might seem to hover a mysterious influence. Instantly a change came over the whole party; they became the people of society and fashion again; and that *débris* of sorrow, passion,

desertion, misery, which had covered the place a few minutes before, was all decently swept away. It was as though some superior officer had come along the disordered ranks, and, in his presence, all order had been restored. Mr. Fotheringham felt that he was such an officer, and that he had the command of the situation virtually in his own hands.

He talked away gaily of the usual topics. Under the politely attentive faces about him, no one would have guessed that there were panting hearts beneath, eagerly anxious, and longing to use the new comer for their ends. Colonel Fotheringham knew all this. He began at once.

"I breakfasted at Starridge's," he said to the Beauty, "with a great

friend of yours — Mrs. Labouchere. She was kind enough to ask me—"

The Beauty started. "Oh, with *her?*" he said, confusedly.

"When I say a great friend," went on the Colonel, laughing, "I mean she *was* a great friend. She was in great spirits and good humour. I never saw her so full of fun, as they say, and so ready to turn people into ridicule."

Livy struck in at once—"She would not do that to us, I suppose. She has finished with us by this time, I hope."

"Oh, yes," he said, "she spared the ladies. No, it was some one else. I stood up for the absent, I assure you."

"I understand all this," said the

Beauty, fuming, and walking about angrily, "I know what it means, and who has arranged all this. If Mrs. Labouchere be angry with me——"

"Angry with you?" repeated his pale wife, unable to restrain herself, "she angry with you?"

"Yes, I know very well how it has been done. It is all a plot. I believe you are all joined in it."

"A plot!" said Colonel Fotheringham, with dignity, "I do not join in plots, Sir. It is not among the many sins laid to my account."

"No; Mr. Talbot is talking very strangely of late," said his wife, "and forgets——"

"Oh, I understand it very well," went on the Beauty, in a rage; "it didn't suit that I should have a friend

that really liked me, and that was good to me. I know about 'wheels within wheels,' but I don't believe it. There's an object in all this."

"Hush, hush, papa," said Livy, "and remember we are not alone."

"Oh, this is a public matter," said he, with an attempt at weight and dignity; "excuse me, it must be cleared up. Grave charges have been made affecting the character of an *absent lady*, and *mine also*. I am very glad Colonel Fotheringham is here. He is a gentleman, and I am sure states candidly what are the facts. It is due to myself, and to *the lady concerned*."

Oh, what humiliation for our Livy! And yet there was something absurd in these heroics. It did not really amount

to anything of gravity. The Beauty went on—

"Grave charges have been made; a lady whom I esteem, and have the highest regard and respect for—who is as pure and noble-minded a person as there exists on this earth—that this lady, I say, has spoken of me in a letter to you, Colonel Fotheringham, behind my back, in the most contemptuous way."

"Oh, father!" said Livy, "don't, don't; spare us; what will this gentleman think of us?"

"We will leave it," said Colonel Fotheringham, now grown very pale, "please leave it as it is; I cannot bear this. No charge is made; if there was anything said, it is withdrawn. I implore you——"

The Beauty took this for a sign of victory. He was very clever. He had brought them to bay. They were afraid. They dared not substantiate the matter.

"Not at all," he said, in triumph, "we are not going to dispose of the matter in that way. I ask Colonel Fotheringham, distinctly, and as a gentleman, I am sure he will answer me—in fact, things have come to this pass—it is his duty to give me an answer. Is it a fact that he received any letter about me, or in which any terms of ridicule were used about me? There."

The Colonel shook his head.

"I thought so. It is scandalous taking away people's characters in ——"

"Stop, stop!" said the Colonel, coolly, "take care, do, what you are saying. You are surely not conveying that any one of your family would invent such a statement; or, say that I told them such a thing, when I did not?"

"Oh, of course not," said the Beauty, hesitating, "but there are such mistakes and exaggerations."

"No, no, it was a distinct statement. Well, then, do you mean to convey, that if it be true I stated such a thing to these ladies, that I should have invented or exaggerated, as you call it; come?"

This was a poser for the Beauty. He paused, and then looked from one to the other angrily. Still he never wanted for courage, and thus pushed

to the wall, but pouting, answered bluntly—

"Well, since you wish to know, I do doubt it."

"Doubt it, Sir? Doubt my word?"

"You have said nothing. I don't meddle with that or with you at all; I don't want it. All I say is, I won't have a lady calumniated. She would never say a word against me."

The Colonel was now growing excited in his turn.

"I am not accustomed," he said, "to hear such things repeated. Again I must call on you to state plainly, do you accuse me of inventing this matter?"

Thus brought to bay, the Beauty said—

"Well, I don't say that; but I say

this — I don't believe, without proof, what is said about Mrs. Labouchere."

The Colonel laughed, and put his hand in his pocket.

"You have required this yourself," he said.

"I don't care how you put it; I don't believe it. There. I think it is a slander against Mrs. Labouchere."

Colonel Fotheringham was a spiteful man. He never could resist the opportunity of "putting down" another man. Here was an opportunity.

"You are not a wise man or a brilliant man, Talbot," he said. "You must begin your education in the world. Much *you* know! But how can I prove it to you? It is very awkward —you won't like it; but as you throw it on me—I have a certain letter here;

and as you have doubted my word, I am bound to substantiate it. It is a little mortifying for you, but you will have it."

With a strange smile the Colonel put his hand into his pocket, and, forgetting all his propriety and honour for a moment, drew out the letter from his pocket. The Beauty trembled with rage and mortification. But still he stumbled on a good retort.

"What, you show a private letter! That is an honourable and gentlemanly thing!"

The Colonel hesitated. Then Livy struck in, fearful that her only chance was going to be lost.

"Show it to him, Colonel Fotheringham. You know you promised me."

But Colonel Fotheringham was ob-

durate. At this moment lunch was announced. This was a diversion. In presence of that matter-of-fact incident of life, all the earnestness and tragedy of the situation melted away. With the cutlets and potted meats, how was it possible to keep up with the grand tragic elements of life? And so the ladies and gentlemen of this situation passed into the dining-room, and the servant attended, and helped sherry round; and they talked of the last Academy exhibition, and of other indifferent matters.

After the lunch—during which Livy was very gay, though, indeed, with a forced sort of gaiety, while the Beauty took his food and drink, with a true characteristic sulkiness — Mrs. Talbot, very pale and worn, and still struggling

with illness, went away to her room. Livy said to her visitor,

"You must let me show you our garden, and my pet bed of flowers."

It was curious to see this veteran fowler, this deadly "shot"—so sure and pitiless—trying to adjust his aim at this gentle, innocent creature. Somehow, under that innocent gaze, he felt discomposed.

"So this is your pet bed of flowers?" he said. "Lucky flowers!"

"I don't know that," she said, acting coquetry. "They blow for me—they put out their prettiest leaves and blossoms for me—they are most compliant in every way, and do anything that I ask them. I am going to ask you, Colonel Fotheringham, to be as compliant as my flowers."

"If I am rewarded by having the same delightful adjectives applied to me, you would find me the same, Miss Olivia."

"I want to see that letter," she said, suddenly growing grave. "You see the state of things with us. There is no convincing our Beauty; no opening his pretty eyes. Just help me in this —oblige me: it will make us happy; and you will have done a real, friendly, generous thing. You will have made a poor rustic family like ours happy. I know he is good, really good, after all. Colonel Fotheringham, you would like to be able to look back to a really friendly and good-natured act? And as you are a man of the world, and always will live *in* the world, and will have very little of this sort of rustic

thing to think of, you may thank me for leaving you something of this sort to think over. And when we are far away, as we shall be soon, you will think of me, whom some people call 'Rustic,' in connection with this really kind and good-natured act."

"Going away!" he repeated. "You do not mean that you are leaving England?"

"Yes, I hope so. I long for a change, for mamma's sake. Her health requires it. She was always delicate, and, as the doctor said, had no nerves."

"And the Beauty, is he to be left behind?"

She paused. "That depends — on you, in some degree."

There was something so piteous, so

appealing, in this little speech of Livy's —something that so placed her outside of the category of women in which this man had counted all ladies of his acquaintance—something so firm and yet child-like—that he felt himself awed, and even reproached. There was something so winning in that sweet face, so tender and sacred, that he felt himself under a sort of irresistible spell, and with a sigh put the letter she wished for into her hand.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DEFEAT.

She flew upstairs to show her prize to her mother. As she reached the landing, she heard the sound of excited voices—husband and wife were having some frantic contest within. She stole away awe-stricken. She was not one of the greedy listeners, for whom anything of this sort becomes dramatic—more attractive than a play. She rather let down the curtain, and shrank away. They were strange voices—hysterical protestations—angry vituperations—voices raised high—

voices sunk low, and still lower. The Beauty had miraculously received some wonderful gift of boldness, but which was indeed not more than a delusive sense of strength in presence of weakness. Every moment he was growing stronger—more indignant, at the wrongs he had to put up with.

After this battle he returned moodily and fuming to his study, meeting his daughter on the way, who was coming hastily from the garden. There was a look of triumph in her eyes, and she waved her precious letter at him. "Now, papa, dear; read this. Only listen to these words,—'As for that Beauty, he is a mere ——'"

Our poor foolish Livy had not taken the wisest way, in legal phrase, to "get in her proofs." Were they writ-

ten in letters as large as those of a poster, it was hardly to be expected that his *amour propre* could endure such a refutation. He lost all patience.

"How dare you hunt me in this way? What do you mean by all of you trying to put me down. I tell you, you won't succeed. I don't believe a word of your stories; I know how you all hate her, and would do anything to destroy her. Even you are getting down a fellow like that—a man with the worst character in London—to take him into confidence: you, that set up to be well brought up! Now, just keep your letter—it's a forgery."

"It's true, it's true," cried the young girl. "O, papa, don't go on this way! Will nothing open your eyes?—will nothing bring you to your

senses? It will all end miserably, I know. You will have mamma's death on you."

The Beauty sneered. He was immensely excited.

"Much any of you cared for me all this time! Whatever happens it has not been my fault. I mean to be master here, in my house, never fear. I have done with all that.

Livy was not equal to this emergency. She had overrated her strength. Who could be expected to resist such evidence? And if her infatuated father would see nothing, know nothing, would be convinced of nothing; what struck her very heart with a chill was, that there was so much worse to come. What *was* to become of them? Even his face—ordinarily so quiet, so calmly

complaisant — seemed to have quite changed, and to have taken a vindictive, malicious, venomous look.

Was it some evil genius—some cruel Puck, that haunts houses, and causes little events to take place at the exact moment when (in conjunction with others) they can do the utmost mischief conceivable?—was it some such familiar who contrived that a letter should arrive at this precise moment for the Beauty? He gave a cry when he saw the writing, and tore it open. Livy turned pale; she had an instinct who this was from.

"There," he said, with an overwhelming sense of tritmph; "there is a Providential refutation of your calumnies! This noble and slandered woman! You should all go on your knees and

beg her pardon. How *dare* you attempt to take away the character of a pure and spotless lady. Listen to this" And he read aloud:—

"'I have decided on leaving England at once—you will guess the reason. No one shall say that *I* caused dissension in any family. Not that I could not carry on the battle with those who resort to the dishonourable weapons of calumny. You have spoken of some letter in which I wrote disparagingly of you. Perhaps I did; perhaps I did not. When you think to whom this letter was written—a man bankrupt in character, and one whom *no unmarried girl should be seen with for a second*, without exciting the worst suspicions——, but I say no more. This is a delicate matter.

"'Come and see me to-night for the last time. I spoke a little warmly last night; but I was hurt by your unkind suspicions. If it was shown to you, even in my own hand-writing, that I had spoken of you in *any* way, you should know me well enough by this time to disdain any such evidence. Any one that knew me thoroughly would believe me before the most convincing evidence in the world. I should not accept any story of you, in preference to what I know of your own nature. Come to me to-night. I count on you; for I want your aid, sympathy, and *advice* above all.'"

"There," cried the Beauty. "I am ashamed of myself for having listened to you so long!"

"You are not going," faltered Livy, in a faint voice. "You cannot do this."

"No power on earth shall detain me."

Livy could not restrain her scorn.

"You should take money with you then. She says she wants your aid."

"She shall have it then. Nothing that I can do could make up to her for the outrages I have allowed to be heaped on her from my house—from people that depend on me. I shall never forgive myself! Never, so long as I live!"

"Oh! but you have not heard what she said. O read! read! I conjure you!"

"Don't forget yourself," he answered. "How do I know what you and your mother have been at. You would

not scruple to carry out your designs."

"You must read it. There! take it —it will open your poor eyes."

"You are growing too impertinent," said the Beauty in a fury; and, taking the letter thus thrust on him, tore it up, and threw the pieces on the ground.

Livy gave a cry, and, turning, left the room. Her last chance seemed gone.

CHAPTER XV.

DALILAH.

The Beauty remained pacing up and down full of joy and triumph. The world was indeed opening for him now. He was able to conquer his enemies—which they were—to take the management of events, which he had never done before. What time he had lost! Yes, he would go, would fly to that noble generous creature, who had so trusted him; even to show them that. It was growing intolerable, this constant interference; they must be reduced to order, and he must

assert himself. As he thought of all this, his eye fell upon the torn-up fragments lying on the ground. They would try to prove anything to him; they hated her so, they would think it no harm to make her write anything.

He took up a few of the pieces and looked at them intently. Yes, it was her writing, there could be no mistake, but then his eye fell on a most disagreeable and disturbing word, "Fribble." Yes, it was quite plain, "fribble," it was. He got some more of the pieces, and began reading what was on them, impelled by an overwhelming curiosity—but his was a woman's mind. Then he came on another disturbing word, "Empty-hea—." Finally he had gathered them all up carefully,

had taken them to his room, and spent a long time putting them laboriously together; no child's puzzle could have been more difficult. When he had done, he got up, tore the whole into smaller fragments still, and flung them out of the window. He was hot and angry.

"So this is the way she chooses to speak of me—never mind! O they are all the same—never mind, I shall make her feel."

There was a book of telegrams in the hall. In a moment he had filled up one with as indignant and cutting a protest as could be transmitted by the public agency of the telegraph:—

"I am not able to go to town, and wish you a pleasant voyage."

But at the same time he determined

not to give them the triumph of seeing that they were right. He would go up to town on business of his own. Yes, he would show them that he was not to be trampled on—what a wonderful deal of trampling that poor human nature bears so well? He was not going to be crushed by *every one*, he was very bitter about all that, and that she for whom he had done so much should have turned false—no matter, they should not have that triumph.

He had long since sent his telegram, and was getting ready to go upon his expedition, when his daughter came down again, with woe and misery in her face.

"Where are you going, papa dear," she said, quickly noticing his preparations, "not away, not up to town?"

"Yes! *must I ask for leave?*"

"She's not well—indeed she is not. I think we ought to send off for someone to see her, she is so weak and languid."

The Beauty laughed scornfully. He was pretty well up, as he thought, to these "tricks."

"Oh I know, I understand; oh she is very strong; she used to go to balls enough, and would bear any exertion. But why not send for a doctor if it is necessary?"

From the look of contempt which Livy gave him, he shrank away. His own daughter was beginning to despise him. Without a word she turned and left him, and yet he could not quite make up his mind what to do. And full of the deepest resentment, discon-

tented with all the world, and longing for some object—toy even, which he could crush and break, to show that he *had* power—he paced about till nearly five o'clock, not able to make up his mind as to what he was to do. Just at that time drove up the local doctor who attended them, and who went in a little hastily.

The Beauty smiled sarcastically. He knew these women very well; in their spite, this was a bit of acting to work on him. Some hysterics, to be magnified into serious illness, with speeches attendant, "Oh you must take care, it is very critical, &c." He was well accustomed to all *that*, to women's fancied illnesses, and he resented its being made an instrument for tyrannizing over him. When the doctor was

going away he came into Mr. Talbot's study, "I don't like the state of things upstairs at all. We must take care; nerves finely strung and all that—fever might supervene."

The Beauty looked at him scornfully. This was the old story. He had been duly primed upstairs.

"Of course, of course," he said, "I understand all that."

The doctor stared at him; he could not understand those glaring eyes.

"I am serious," he said, "we must really look to this, Mr. Talbot, your wife is in a critical way. She is excited, and must be soothed and kept quiet."

"Of course," said the Beauty, pettishly; "she is kept quiet in this house; every attention is paid to her here. What do you mean?"

The doctor again stared at him. At that moment a cab drove up to the door, and one of the porters belonging to the station jumped out, a letter was brought in; which the Beauty tore open eagerly. The doctor went his way wondering.

Livy had come down again, and was standing before her father, pale and agitated. He was devouring the letter, every word of it, and she knew perfectly, though she could not see the writing, or whom it was from. The very hand-writing that he read was in his poor fatuous face.

"Come up, father," she said, she had latterly begun to call him by that formal and official name, "she is very ill, you have excited her and made her ill."

He was still reading; he was not listening. The letter ran—

"I have come down from London, and am waiting at the station to see you—if you will come to me. Say to the bearer that you will, or that you will not. A simple answer, yes or no, will be enough."

Livy, still excited, struck in—alas! injudiciously—

"You have not lost all humanity, or feeling, or duty? You dare receive such things, when she is ill and in peril?"

"I don't believe it," he said. "This is some of your tricks."

"Tricks! come up and see then! Poor mamma, she is ill indeed; and it is you who have made her so."

"Yes; put it on me! I am up to

that game by this time. I have business that takes me up to town."

"Takes you up to town! You would leave her in that state?"

"Oh, yes; I am up to all that. I'll find her perfectly well when I come back."

"You are lost to all decency. Go, then, I shall not detain you: and God forgive you!"

He was in a fever to get away, and yet was undecided. He felt some shame when she left him. He was not bad altogether; it was this miserable infatuation working on his vanity that was causing this moral cataract to spread over his eyes. A sort of shame and pity took possession of him, and he went up hesitating, and with soft steps. "At all events I can just see

her: though women's hysterics——"

But he caught the sound of voices, and his own name, uttered in excited tones——

"The blinded, empty creature; God forgive him! I despise him——"

It was enough. He turned, walked down stairs, got his hat, entered the cab, and was driven away.

CHAPTER XVI.

LIVY'S PLAN.

THERE was one up-stairs tending a poor wasted figure in the bed, who caught the sound of the wheels, and to whom it might have been as dismal and grating as the sound of the crumbled gravel under the wheels of a hearse, bearing away the remains of one whom she loved more than her own life. The ears of the sick lady were too dull to catch that fatal sound.

Her indefatigable child was ever ready, ever versatile where her amazing

affection was concerned, and which furnished her with arms, with devices, power, strength; nay, with *heart*, and a spirit that never flagged a moment. Here in this new disastrous state of things she was only nerved to more desperate exertion. Yet what could she do; what could she next turn to? In half an hour, or an hour, her mother would ask for him. What could she say? what excuse could she give? No subterfuge would avail; it *must* come out: and it did, after this fashion.

It was amazing what a change had come over the once famous lady of fashion, who within these few days seemed, as she lay there, like one who had received some terrible shock. Late in the evening she roused herself, and asked gently for *him*.

"He is gone out, mamma, dearest" —not knowing what to say.

"Where? When will he be back? After all, dear, do you know what I have been thinking? We have been too serious, too severe in the whole matter. I may have magnified it; I am a poor foolish sick woman. He looks at these things in his own way; it does not go beyond fancy, and it amuses him. When will he be back, dear?"

"Not till late, mamma, I fear. I think he had business in London."

"*Business in London!*"

Down toppled the little card house the poor lady had built up. A blankness fell upon both, but she said not a word. A little later she asked about some letter that was to have gone to

the post. A maid, who was fluttering about the room, struck in, eager to soothe her.

"It was late, m'm; but we gave it to the lady's cabman."

"The lady's cabman!" faltered Mrs. Talbot, raising herself up.

Alas! no ingenious prevarication could avail. What lady? what cab? It had all to come out. *A cab had been sent up from the station, by a lady who was waiting there*, and Mr. Talbot had gone away in it.

In vain the protests and signs of Livy; in vain her despairing pantomime to the foolish woman who had told all this story.

The unhappy lady gazed at the maid, then restrained herself a moment, and in a low suppressed voice, demanded

further details. There could be no further concealment—the telegram, the messenger, the cab, all was quietly investigated: Then she said:

"I see it all now. I know what this means. It is the beginning of the end."

Passionately our Livy strove to soothe her. With an ingenuity worthy of a special pleader, she invalidated every apparent argument that her unhappy mother clutched at, in desperation.

"It is that woman. I knew it from the beginning. *She is stronger than I am!* I ought to have known that from the first day. I made a feeble ineffectual struggle; but I was a poor ineffectual creature; no match for her. She is a wicked cruel *demon*, but she

is stronger than I am. I own it. She has won, and I have lost."

She was trembling all over, shaking and quivering; some new hysterical visitation was coming over her. Livy was aghast.

"It is not so much affection for him. I don't take the credit of that. Let any one who likes know it; it is mortification, and disappointment, not to be able to defeat a creature of that sort —a poor second-rate thing. Well may the world despise me."

She paused. Then went on again.

"What an infatuation! What a miserable, hopeless infatuation! There, he had it before him in black and white, and yet he would not believe his poor eyes. And yet, to get anything like the same result, no one

could guess all that I have gone through — the miserable struggle of many years — to secure not a tenth part of what this woman has done in a few weeks."

"Dearest mother, don't think of it: don't worry yourself, I implore of you."

"But others will think of it—talk of it—laugh at it! Don't you imagine that I have not old enemies of twenty years' time, who are still as envenomed against me as ever, and would do anything to mortify me; and would enjoy my mortification even after this long interval? I have insulted and trampled on them; and they would enjoy this revenge. Oh! I cannot endure the thought."

There was something so new, so

wild, so strange to Livy in this tone and excitement, that she gazed at her mother with something of terror. There was a *fresh* wildness, a new fire and shiftiness in her eyes which she had never noticed before. This dwelling on one subject had often, she had heard, produced some terrible result. The doctor's warning — "to soothe, to keep quiet"—came back on her. But how? No doctor's prescription could tell her. She felt herself utterly helpless — in utter despair!

It was now past five o'clock, and growing dark. She went on more excitedly still.

"Am I to sit down here patiently, and be trampled on—put up with any treatment — have the finger of scorn pointed at me? Never! I shall not

belie my whole life; I shall die struggling, as I have lived. Come, let us go. Let us follow, and bring him back."

"Mother! mother! what are you about? You will kill yourself. The doctor said you were not to think of such things."

In a wild, earnest way the mother said: "Let us go: go, and at once! Not a moment must be lost. It is only mercy to him. Let us set out at once, and bring him back."

"Oh, but mamma, how? You must not. It is too late now. He will be here: I know he will return."

There was a strange solemnity about Mrs. Talbot; a sort of wild earnestness, joined with power and determination, which quite alarmed her daughter. She

could not resist, and she felt that she could not resist, her purpose.

In a short time a fly from the village was at the door. The weeping Livy, looking at the pale, worn, ghastly face, almost fell on her knees to detain her. But there was a stern purpose in the mother's face there was no misunderstanding. Livy was helpless, and got into the carriage with her. The wondering servants stood at the door watching this mysterious departure, speculating and auguring the worst. "Missus was taking leave of her senses, going out at such a time of night."

At the station she almost fainted, but with indomitable resolution she rallied again. Long after, Livy recalled that weary transit in the railway carriage—the dull, damp and dusky blue

cushions, which gave the idea of a cell. Mrs. Talbot seemed lost in a sort of abstraction—her lips were compressed. There was no one in the compartment but the two ladies.

The journey seemed eternal—never coming to an end. And in the meantime it began to grow dark, and about half an hour from London the lamps were lighted, which gave a kind of mournful and lugubrious air to the interior of their blue cell.

Then they were on the platform, amid the crowd pushing past them, looking for luggage, with the cold evening air sweeping up the station, along the platform.

They got into a cab, and then, for the first time, the question occurred, "Where were they to go?"

Mrs. Talbot roused herself out of her reverie.

"You see, dearest," said her daughter, eagerly, "we shall not find him. How can we think of looking in this vast city—"

"For him? Let us seek *her*. I do not want *him*. Where does she live?"

This question was put fiercely, and determinedly.

"I want to meet *her;* for this night shall end the whole struggle, now and for ever! I cannot endure it longer."

In a faltering voice Livy said,

"She was at the hotel—Starridge's."

"Then drive to Starridge's."

They drove off to that well-known

and select family hotel. As they came up to the door, the light was reflected back from the shining plate-glass windows. A few carriages, sober and glittering in their windows, also stood by, to take away the owners. There was a Queen's ball that night, and various distinguished county families had come up to town, to Starridge's, to go to the solemnity. There were lights in many windows, where the young ladies were dressing. A blaze, as from a lantern came out from the hall, where servants were waiting.

"Was Mrs. Labouchere there?"

Yes, she was staying there; but was engaged.

"No matter. They must take up that name."

It was impossible. She was just

going away—to the Continent, by the night train.

Ah, she was flying—beaten—afraid to carry on the contest!

The sick lady looked over at her daughter with a sort of exultation. They were certain? No mistake? Well, they supposed so: there were her boxes coming down.

"No matter, I shall not trust her," said Mrs. Talbot, "I shall wait on her, and *must* see her too. She will think when she hears that I have been here, that I was afraid to meet her."

Livy did not answer her, did not hear her; in fact her whole heart and soul were absorbed by a figure which she saw in the hall, and recognized, a figure which had glided down, and

was busy over the trunks, and giving directions with a sort of fussiness—utterly unconscious that any domestic eyes were gazing on his movements. It was a truly dramatic situation. He had even an air of command, the old foolish bustle and importance—ordering the waiters about—it was a pitiable sight indeed for her.

But the whole anxiety and burden on her mind was the fear lest her mother should see, or catch a glimpse. At times his face was even turned full on the cab, in the glare of the light; but still she did not remark him. Something must be done, for she wished to get out, go upstairs and meet her enemy; when with a sudden thought, Livy said hurriedly.

"You must not go in, mother, you

cannot do it! In this place too. Or, at least, let me go in first, and then you can follow, if you wish."

As she spoke, she got out and entered. No one noticed the veiled young girl who had fluttered in so softly, and she heard her father giving words of command in his own old foolish and excited way.

"Here I say! Get down that trunk —we shall be late! *Has my portmanteau been got down?* See that it is labelled 'For Paris,' at the station."

"My portmanteau got down!" What were these terrible words that seemed to strike her full in the face, like blows of a club?

Was *he* going with her?

CHAPTER XVII.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

He was in the shadow now, out of the glare of the light, so that he could not be seen from the street. She stepped lightly aside into a parlour that was open, and bade one of the waiters tell that gentleman to come to her.

The confounded look in the Beauty's face, the rage, vexation, disappointment, was something to see.

"You here!" he said, "what do you want? I won't have this. Now, just go back. I won't go with you."

"What does all this wickedness mean?" she said, with almost solemnity in her voice, "I heard you give some directions about a trunk."

"Yes, always spying on me. What if I did? I'll do as I like now. I am sick of the whole business!"

He was trembling with excitement. Yet still, though she saw now the unutterable depths to which his folly was leading him—folly still, though on the verge of being converted into wickedness — she wished to save him, to preserve their dignity, before the house, and before her mother. She would not even pretend to see what his purpose had been. Such delicacy for their mutual interest had this young girl.

"Ah! come home at once," she

said. "Give up all this folly. Say goodbye to her, and let her go."

"I don't want you here. I wish you would leave me alone. Such work and fuss as it is, following me about in this way. I can't go up to London, without having you all after me in this way. I tell you, I won't have it."

"And do you tell me," said she, "that you will leave this with —? You cannot, you dare not!"

"Dare not? What do you mean? Now, just go away. I won't have this sort of thing. Pursuing me up to London as if I were a child!"

"Come, come, dear papa, come home with me—with us."

"With *us?*"

"Yes; mamma is waiting outside. She was determined to come up here."

The face of the Beauty flushed up. He felt himself a miserable, degraded, hunted, persecuted man. All this was childish, undignified, and he would not "put up with it."

"Just go away," he repeated; "I don't want you here; I won't have it."

"But mamma? O, poor mamma, she is so ill, and waiting there outside! Yes."

"Waiting there outside? O, this is unendurable. How *dare* you do this? It is uncalled for—and I don't choose it—and I won't have it; so I command you to go away and leave me."

"No, father," she answered, calmly, and even sternly; "I remain here—and she shall remain too."

He was thunderstruck at this firm tone. A waiter entered here and said—

"Please, sir, Mrs. Labouchere wishes to see you up stairs; she is waiting."

It was a terrible situation.

"Now," she said, and her nerves and firm purpose were all strung with a sort of supernatural strength, "now, papa, there is no time for compromise or hesitation. We are at arms' length, and I will not see my poor sweet treasure, who is at the door, perish through your unkindness. What do you wish? Will you come away with us, and say goodbye to this woman; or if you do not, do you choose a scene here—to be disgraced before the house, to be exposed in this undignified

position? Say, at once, which you prefer?"

The Beauty was speechless at this arrogant defiance. He was enraged at being thus checked by a mere foolish girl. But what was he to do? Beside himself with anger, he turned round suddenly, and left the room.

There was triumph in Livy's eyes. She paused a moment to collect her thoughts, then hurried from the room, and ran to her mother waiting outside.

"Dearest," she said, eagerly, "promise me this; everything will go well, if you only leave it to me; put all into my hands—oh, you must, you shall; you must not interfere; but just go away to the station, and wait for me. Oh, do this, and all shall be well. Fly from him!"

"Never; so long as I live I shall never do that?"

"You must—it is the only thing I ever asked of you. It is not flying from her. I am a match for her. Leave all to me. There! there, coachman," and she bade him drive away to the station with unspeakable relief; she saw that her mother made no further protest, and then she hurried back into the room. She found Mrs. Labouchere, in travelling dress, waiting there.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A CRISIS.

THAT lady's face was contorted with anger, so as almost to look ugly. She stamped her foot as Livy, with flushed cheek, came running in.

"So you have come again. I am sorry I have no time to wait and see you. Mr. Talbot is going to see me on my journey. We have very little time to lose."

"You can go, then," said Livy, with a tremulous voice. "I do not detain you."

"I know that. You would scarcely

venture to interfere with my movements. Things have not gone quite so far as that."

"They have gone far enough," said Livy; "but it must stop here."

"That is as it may be. Then what is the object of your visit at this extraordinary hour?"

"I wish my father to escort me back."

"I am afraid," said the lady, looking at him with a doubtful smile; "perhaps he will not receive his orders from you, or obey, and return to school?"

"I have had enough of this," he said, impatiently, "and won't be interfered with. I command you to go home at once. I shall see Mrs. Labouchere to the train."

"Then I shall wait for you here."

"I am not returning here. Stand out of the way," he added, roughly.

"No, he won't return here to-night," said Mrs. Labouchere, meaningly. "However, observe I have nothing to do with his movements. Whatever good-natured offices he performs for me, they are all spontaneous, I assure you."

"It is very disinterested of him," said Livy, her voice trembling; "and very spontaneous of him, considering the picture you have drawn of him in letters to your friends. Poor unfortunate papa! nothing will open his eyes."

"How dare you? I won't have this. It was a forgery; and never referred to me. So much for your spite, and this

conspiracy. I never believed a word of it, Mrs. Labouchere; and you made it as clear as light to me."

"Oh, *that* is the explanation," said Livy, turning to her enemy in triumph. "So you stoop to *that*—to deny your own handwriting; well, all through I gave you credit for ingenuousness that was above board; but I did not think you would descend to that meanness."

The other was much confused and colouring.

"I never *did* deny it; but I said that there was a conspiracy to set everything in the worst light."

"Yes," he added, supporting her eagerly; "and that it applied to quite another thing—I understand you."

"But let us understand clearly *now*.

Surely, I—we — saw the words with *his* name: it made my cheeks tingle as I read. Surely, there could be no mistake in *that.* Do you deny it?"

"Of course she does," he said, eagerly. "You know nothing about the matter."

"I do not deny it! and never did!" she said, fiercely. "No one shall accuse me of untruth. I own it here before him — make what you like of it."

"Ah! you hear, father."

He faltered, and looked at Mrs. Labouchere.

"Then what did it mean? You told me——"

"Never. *I* did not wish to hurt you—nor do I now, dear Mr. Talbot.

I will explain all these things to you by and by. Come, come, now," said the siren, putting on a most seductive and enchanting smile. "Come with me. You will not desert me in the face of calumny—I can count on you at this last moment."

A waiter entered now, and disturbed this curious and unmelodious trio that was going on. The infatuated Beauty gave way at once.

"Yes, I am ready!" he exclaimed.

The young girl gave a cry, and placed herself before the door.

She stood between them and the door, and the spirit of determination which filled her face, gave her quite the air of a heroine suited for painting or sculpture.

"You can leave this room if you like,

but I warn you there shall be a scene here—in the hall—before the house—before the world! You can go to the railway station, if you wish; I do not hinder you. But again I warn you. I will follow you there, and shall find a way to expose you. I know that she —*you* will not care for such an exposure; but *you* will, papa. You have delicacy, and sensitiveness, and decency, and will not allow this lady to expose you in such a way."

Mrs. Labouchere looked at her with an expression of baffled rage and fury. She stamped her foot.

"Are you her father? Do you put up with this language? and do you allow me to be spoken to in this fashion —to be insulted? Are you so weak that you cannot assert your power over

a girl of her sort? This is a pretty exhibition indeed for me to be treated to. I wish to pass out—I shall be late."

"You can go if you will. So can he," said the young girl, suddenly giving way and throwing the door open. "But mark—he knows me, and that I have never shrunk from doing all that I say. Leave that hall with him, and I call on the people of the hotel, and tell them my story. That I am his daughter—that *you* are——"

She stopped. Mrs. Labouchere looked furious. The Beauty was pale with anger, irresolution, and terror. He knew not what to do. He was cowed before his own child. He was not quite pleased either by the tone of the

lady, whose companion he had been, and for whom he had sacrificed so much. She had turned on him, with actually a sneer.

"I am afraid," she said, "you are hardly fitted for the rather responsible situation you have placed yourself in. Have you measured your own strength? At least, you should have done so, before taking up such a position. A man should learn to control his own household first. Still, your daughter meant no such low, vulgar scene as she seems to threaten me with. Such may suit a certain class, but not me at all. But this is what I do. I call upon you—at least you can do this—to take care that I am not exposed to any exhibition of this sort. I require it from you—it is the least you can do!"

After all, this young girl, weak, powerless as she seemed, had brought them into this dilemma. The Beauty, stung with mortification at the desertion — hurt at being addressed in this way before his daughter, before whom he wished to keep up his pride— kept looking from one to the other. Then he made a desperate rally.

"I command you to go away, and to make no fuss. Do you hear me; you must obey me."

Livy never stirred, only shook her head and smiled.

"There is the door," she said, "it is open, I go on before you into the hall. But if he goes, I shall do what I say, as surely as there is a heaven above us."

"A good defiance and challenge,"

said the lady. "They can speak any way to you, in your own family. You cannot do it," she added, pityingly, "the leopard cannot change his spots. You had better submit."

"But she *shall* submit. I am not going to be treated in this way. Let her do it if she dare. Come Mrs. Labouchere, you shall see."

He offered his arm. Livy turned pale, her heart misgave her.

But help came, and at that moment the door was opened, and a servant entered, saying—

"Mrs. Talbot is waiting, sir, and wishes to see you."

CHAPTER XIX.

FINALE.

In a moment that pale face and worn figure stood before them, in the doorway.

Mrs. Labouchere stamped on the ground impatiently.

"You are but a clumsy workman," she said to him in a low voice. "This is clearly not your department. Take my advice and return to your old domestic habits. It will be the wisest thing you can do. Dear me! What an invasion, the whole family come to see me off!"

"Going away, are you, going away," said Mrs. Talbot. "Thank God!"

"Oh! now, no scene or confusion! I beg for that. All I want is to get to my continental train without any confusion, before the people of the house. I will withdraw—retire—will do anything so as to keep up my credit as a lady with the people of the house. Any family scenes or things of that sort I have not been accustomed to. *Indeed*, the game is not worth the candle."

The Beauty was utterly helpless, his head hanging down on his breast, not knowing what to do, and bitterly resenting these open sneers.

"The game is not worth the candle, of which I have already burnt too much in my life. I want all the waxlight I

can get. It is very precious. Ah, my dear Mr. Talbot, you do not know how to manage things. It is out of your line. Take my advice, as that of an old friend, don't meddle with these things in future. You have the awkward knack of blundering. See what a little meeting you have contrived here! Your daughter, wife, all gathered in my apartment, threatening to call in the people of the house, to raise some vulgar storm! Shocking! The situation you see is beyond your control. So now I advise you—go back quietly in honourable custody, be submissive, and the past will be perhaps condoned, and, above all, in future devote yourself to chronicling small beer, and to your old department, for which you are eminently——"

"How nasty; how unkind of you," said the Beauty, "to speak to me in this way. You have no heart, and they were right when they said so"

"Yes," said Mrs. Talbot, "We can see what she is now. Thank God for opening your eyes at last."

The lady burst out laughing.

"No heart, he says. Why surely you were not taking it all *au grand sérieux.* Surely you must have seen, Mr. Beauty Talbot, that I had something more than some pastime in view; something with which to fill up my hours. Whatever end I had in view, Mrs. Talbot, it has been carried out perfectly. I have succeeded."

"No," said Livy, looking at her steadily. "No, you have not."

"Take care," said the lady. "Do not try me too far. As it is, you do

not know what you have done. As you have chosen to take her place, and have put yourself forward, you have incurred a debt which I shall one day call on you to pay. I only wait a more convenient opportunity. Mind, I warn you. You have not done with Mrs. Labouchere yet!"

"Threaten my poor child!" said Mrs. Talbot aghast. "What has she done to you, you unscrupulous woman?"

"She knows very well," said the other fiercely. "Let her think of it. It will comfort her in all her approaching happiness. The sweet devoted daughter; the gentle creature who will, of course, have her reward in marrying the man of her choice. Yet my sister-in-law she will be after all! Think of that."

"I did you no harm. I was only protecting all that was most dear to me."

"You have dared to set yourself up against *me!* You, a poor child! But never fear! all in good time. I could have been content to have despised you all; had you let *me* alone. No; but *she* must insult us by open contempt of my father's honestly-got wealth, and of his origin, for which he was not accountable. That insolence drove me mad almost, and I vowed I would punish its author as she deserved—make her feel as much mortification as she inflicted on me. Was it genteel, lady-like, worthy of high birth? No matter. Let any one survey the whole party at this moment, and say which ought to have the most pride now."

She looked round on them all triumphantly. The picture was actually as she described it. For there was the fine lady, who at the beginning of this story had been so haughty and insolent to the *nouveau-riche* family, who had amused herself at those parties of Mr. Hardman, launching her little arrows into the neck of her victim, like the Spanish bullfighters; the grand lady sitting up enthroned, while they, the low-born, had to do homage before her—that miserable rebuff of the returned picture, which affected her more than anything; certainly, for all these outrages here was indemnity!

Enter now Mr. Motcombe (who was the Starridge of the day) in person.

"I am afraid, ma'am, you will be late. There are only twelve minutes to spare."

"Then I must go. Adieu! adieu, all round," she said, with her old sweet manner. "Remember," she said to Livy, "you shall hear of me again, I promise you that."

"I shall be ready, and shall reply," said Livy, firmly.

"Good-bye, Mr. Talbot, remember my good advice—sing your little song, the 'Last Eternal Smile,' was it not?" —even this distortion of the title of his famous song, hurt our Beauty as much as anything—"sing it at the little parties about; but never attempt any grand enterprise of this kind. You have not the stuff, the fearless gifts, to carry such a thing through. Adieu."

She was gone. The trio were left in that room together—a strangely humiliated party—the Beauty literally writhing with shame and mortification. He was not more than a boy—a boy of nearly forty or so—but still an untrained boy, whose education was actively going on, and would not be completed for the next dozen years. On this principle, perhaps, it might turn out a wholesome lesson for him.

Mrs. Talbot was humiliated too, but thankful. There was even a secret joy in her heart at the deliverance. She was a true woman; her enemy was gone; she had the field to herself; affection would do much still. She believed in that wonderful arm.

But for our Livy, what a deal there

was before her, as, indeed, she felt. It was the task, the heavy, up-hill task, of "reconstruction," as difficult as that American business; she would strive and labour at it, however, though there was nothing but ruins strewn about her.

How was she even to begin. She had no element in her favour. The Beauty was, indeed, softened to her purpose, annealed, judiciously cowed, ashamed of himself; and over him, besides, there was a sort of trepidation and uneasiness, which her quick eye detected, and detected with a sort of joy.

That night, when her mother was above stairs, lying down, wearied, ill, yet still calm, and tranquil, Livy was below with her father.

This uneasiness was strong upon him.

"We must never go back on this night, father," she said, with that new, steady manner which had come on her within these latter days, and made him uncomfortable. "The whole of this night's business — would to heaven it could be dropped out of our lives! Still, we need never think of it again. And I promise you this, dear papa, I shall school myself to forget it even, provided that you do your best to make me forget it."

His eyes fell upon the ground. Then he said eagerly,

"She was a wicked, cruel, spiteful creature; and—"

"Hush," said Livy; "that is not the way to look at it. Poor mamma,

who has suffered so much, she must never be let to think of this night either. It is humiliating for us all; but for *her*—." She paused. "And if you were only kind and attentive, and tried to do your best, then this night would be forgotten."

He understood her. It was a sort of bargain. He felt that he had re-entered his old servitude, but with a mistress of more mental power. But he was in truth heartily ashamed. He could not bring himself to think of the degradation he had gone through; his public mortification; and, above all, to think that he had been on the verge of——. His sense of humiliation was so great, that he began presently to persuade himself he never seriously *meant* to carry out such a thing;

it was a mere thought, born of irritation. Still, when he saw his daughter's calm eyes fixed upon him, he was relieved that it was to be heard of no more: he was grateful for the forbearance, and he knew her well enough to believe that she would loyally, honourably, and fairly carry it out.

And so she did.

From that night a new life began for them all. She stepped into that place which her mother had filled, and filled so indiscreetly heretofore. That abdication was cheerfully accorded. In vain came young Mr. Hardman, her lover and slave, filled with a fresh admiration of her gifts and charms, to beg that she would think of him now.

Her answer always was,—

"You must wait. If you are content

to do this, I can love you. But I have duties here more sacred. Later on we shall think of each other."

And so he was content to wait, and did wait very long and very patiently.

Meanwhile, the Beauty goes back slowly into his old life, and sings his little songs about. Indeed, he is a great "composer" now—*i.e.*, has got a hold of a certain public—writing under the name of "SILVIO." D'Alberg and Cocker actually publish a long list of these sweetly sentimental things, which the fashionable music-masters in London and Brighton teach their young ladies to warble, and which are of this style and description:—Songs by Silvio: "He gave one last and lingering smile" (second thousand), words by Annabel; "The Swallow;"

"Her hand in mine," words by Fides; "His eye was soft, his voice was sweet" (second thousand), words by Fides, with many others. "Fides" and "Annabel" were ladies of his acquaintance who admired him. Our Livy forwarded these little pursuits as very harmless and useful, worked hard at revising them, for they outraged the laws of harmony barbarously, and her energy got them published. She had a strange influence over him, possibly owing to that little secret which was between father and daughter.

That secret Mrs. Talbot, growing fresh and fair again, from good health and good spirits, never so much as dreamed of. To the day of her death she shall never know it. Indeed the Beauty behaves very well on the whole.

He has his little harmless flirtations now and again, at which Mrs. Talbot smiles. He is indeed not a little disturbed by one thing, which positively weighs on his spirits and depresses him. He feels he is getting *fat!* He is horror-stricken at a sort of gentle incline, and is going to take meal biscuits at breakfast, bran cakes, and the like, which he hears is better than Mr. Banting's famous regimen. This, with the songs, engages his chief attention.

Mrs. Labouchere is in exile. No one hears of her, or has heard. Mr. Hardman is going to get into Parliament. Old Dick Lumley is still alive, and "capering" down to "dear Lady Towler's," or up again from the "Duke's." These various characters go on their old way. In truth their

story is but incomplete. Mrs. Labouchere is certainly one of those of whom people say, "That woman has a history." Such a one must certainly work out a history for herself of some kind. What that history is, may be traced on another occasion. She certainly was not likely to forget those last words she addressed to Livy; nor was she ever likely to forgive that young girl.

THE END.

37